

ADRIFT:

A STORY OF NIAGARA.

BY

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PHILADELPHIA.

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Inscribed
to
William Dean Howells.

ADRIFT:

A STORY OF NIAGARA.

CHAPTER I.

"And wherever we turn, and whatever we do,
Still that horrible sense of the *déjà connu*."

OWEN MEREDITH.

ON a certain April evening a year or so ago the city of Buffalo had evidently incurred the displeasure of the powers who dispense the weather, and was suffering—shall we say as usual?—all the outrages which Borcas, Frey, and the other storm-creators could inflict. The wind howled and tore through the trees as if anxious to strip them of their early buds, and to a fanciful observer the incessant rain might have seemed like a cruel and heavy lash laid upon the few shrinking pedestrians.

There were doubtless numerous tenements in the city whose inmates were incommoded by the tempest, inasmuch as the chill breath of the wind through crevice and keyhole is not a welcome visitor, and as water has a disagreeable tendency to trickle through pervious roofs. But there were also many residences, on the contrary, whose internal comfort was only enhanced by the contrast between

the cold and damp without and the light, heat, and fragrance within. Among the latter was a small house in a fashionable street, owned and occupied by Mr. John Forrester, a gentleman who had been destined by his parents to adorn the legal profession, but who had after a few years' trial abandoned it for the more immediately lucrative occupation of banker and broker. The emoluments of his chosen calling had been considerable, and now, in his thirtieth year, he was able to live in a style which was the height of luxury compared with the manner of his existence a decade previous. It was very much to his gratification that this result had been obtained without intense application to books or any burning of the midnight oil except that consumed in social and convivial gatherings.

"The beauty of my business," he was wont to say, "is that it's not necessary to crowd the mind with unimportant facts. I'm not required to say at a moment's notice who it was that discovered the circulation of the blood, or in what year Martin Luther was born, or to air my ignorance of Magna Charta. No; I let the dead past slip by, and concern myself only with the things of this hour, or at most the things of this week or this month. I read the newspapers, of course,—in them we find the cream of all literature, ancient and modern, separated from the skim-milk of metaphor and poetry, and expressed in that terse American vernacular which beats all other languages for going straight to the point!"

Such being Mr. Forrester's opinion, it was but natural that on this rainy April evening he should

be reading a newspaper. On the other hand, it would have been equally surprising to find him seated in a room so well supplied with books as almost to deserve the title of library, only that the partner of his home was a lady whose views on this as on most other subjects were diametrically opposed to her lord's, Mrs. Forrester being intensely, impartially devoted to French, German, and English literature.

The room was well furnished, and littered with works of art in various stages of progress. An Ariadne, lumpy and dropsical-looking, reclined on the mantel-shelf, incompletely evolved from the surrounding clay. A heap of bright silks lay on a table beside a piece of ruby plush, one incipient bud thereon alone revealing that, fortune favoring, its lustrous surface would some time be enriched by a spray of wild roses. On an easel in the corner was a half-finished crayon head of Dante; the unskilful draughtsman having been unable to reproduce the well-known melancholy droop of mouth and eyelids, the great Florentine's usual lugubrious expression was replaced by a sort of smirk which could not fail to make the judicious grieve. Besides these articles and the implements required in their execution, books, letters, pamphlets, and newspapers were strewn about in a careless confusion from which one might infer the presiding genius of the apartment to be a woman of versatile tastes and manifold intellectual resources, as well as a very untidy house-keeper.

Mr. Forrester brought to the perusal of his news-

paper the same habits which made him a successful business-man. He knew instinctively what items would appeal to his interest, and read those only ; but read them, whether trivial or important, with a quick and thorough mental grasp which left in his memory not a series of shadowy impressions, but a distinct array of facts. Having thus mastered everything that was of value to him in the paper, he folded it neatly and put it down on the table, across which he looked in silence for some moments at his wife.

Presently she also laid aside her book,—a novel in French,—and remarked in that language that she was bored, weary, and sad. Mrs. Forrester rarely resorted to a foreign tongue to express her sentiments ; never, indeed, unless with the express purpose of annoying her husband. On this occasion she was foiled in the endeavor, for he replied only by an amiable and interrogative smile, whereat she relented and observed in English,—

“Jack, I’m tired, I’m stupid, I’m unhappy ! There’s no pleasure to be had out of books any more ; they get duller every year.”

“That’s my own opinion precisely !” Mr. Forrester began, with emphasis ; but he was promptly interrupted by his wife, who seldom let any statement pass unchallenged, even when it was in direct confirmation of her own views.

“John Forrester, I’m surprised at your temerity !” she said, severely. “You to say one word against books,—you, that never open one, except check-books and ledgers ! When I say they get duller every year, I merely mean they seem so to me.”

"Perhaps, my dear, you read too much," suggested the gentleman, tentatively.

"Nonsense, Jack! I read comparatively little now. Two novels a day was my allowance a year ago; but they have lately palled upon me so that I can hardly read one a week through to the bitter end. Even in my best estate I could never bring myself to begin at the beginning."

"How would it do to read something solid,—some government reports or common council proceedings?" said Mr. Forrester, still tentatively.

This was acknowledged only by a derisive glance. "No," continued the lady; "I know perfectly well what is the matter with me,—I have not enough to do. My brain and hands are alike idle. These last few years, since my life has been devoid of real, useful occupation, I have not felt contented at all. I have actually been thinking, Jack, that I should like to dismiss the girls and do my own work again."

"*Again*, Bella? I was under the impression that when we formerly dispensed with servants the work simply wasn't done at all."

Mrs. Forrester, lost in a maze of agreeable memories, ignored this interpolation. "And you know, Jack," she went on, musingly, "that after our little dinners were over——"

"And *very* little dinners they used to be, too!" said Jack, with a retrospective groan. "You didn't do much cooking, Bella; I was a living—no, an almost dead proof of that. Though, to do you justice, I must say I never saw your equal at getting up a meal of tea and soda-crackers."

"Well, anyway, after dinner I would change my dress and sit down at my desk all alone, and go slowly through the French grammar."

"I highly approve of that portion of your project. I don't think you are nearly as proficient in French as you pretend to be, and it would certainly be beneficial to you to go through the grammar again."

"Of course I do not dream of doing that!" instantly rejoined the lady. "But I have lately felt profoundly interested in Dante, and I don't see why I should not read him in the original."

"Now, Bella, just stop right where you are!" said her husband, vainly endeavoring to impart an angry and authoritative ring to his pleasant voice. "Long self-discipline, long humbling of a naturally proud spirit, has at last enabled me to listen patiently to unintelligible remarks in French and German; but I draw the line at Italian!"

"Ah, well, that's not essential. I won't quarrel about a trifle——"

"No? Really, Bella, you are certainly not yourself if you do not seize upon any pretext whatever for quarrelling!"

"The main thing I am anxious about," explained Mrs. Forrester, with a good deal of earnestness, "is whether it would or would not be a good thing for me to do my own housework again. I often feel as if my mission in life was no higher than washing dishes."

"On the contrary, I am convinced that your genius does not at all find its fitting medium of expression in that homely employment," said Mr. For-

rester, solemnly. "You can do *anything* better than washing dishes. Don't trouble yourself to reply, Bella,—the shock of finding you for once in accord with me might unhinge my reason."

Bella laughed, somewhat reluctantly. "To tell the truth, Jack," she confessed, "If I were so unfortunate as to engage a servant who would break and burn and tear things in the reckless fashion that I used to do, I wouldn't keep the creature in the house two hours." She ceased to laugh, and, letting her serious eyes rest on her husband's, said, gravely, "I'm positively ashamed to tell you this, Jack, it's so absurd, so grotesque: but do you know nothing brings back so plainly the dear old times, the early years of our marriage, as to smell in the street the odors of scorching cake or potatoes or milk escaping from some kitchen. I knew these scents so well of old I can distinguish them all."

"You won't mind my mentioning what I conceive to be the best result of your culinary efforts, Bella? They enabled me to acquire a peculiar gastronomic accomplishment: I can never be deceived in a restaurant, in my own house, or at a friend's table; I know unerringly when a thing is ill-cooked!"

Bella joined in his laugh at this, but after a moment she said, soberly,—

"Jack, I'm really unhappy, and you don't help me; you don't suggest anything."

"You know, dear, you wouldn't pay the least attention to anything I *did* suggest," her husband said, gently.

"No, of course not; still, I should like to hear what you have to say."

"Well, then, Bella, as for letting the servants go, you would be ready in a week's time to crawl on your hands and knees from the Terrace to Cold Spring to get them back again. It's altogether out of the question. Why don't you complete some of the work you have lying about here? I wish you had a little of my industry and zeal, dear; whatever I happen to be doing seems to be for the time the most interesting and valuable thing in the world. Finish your mirthful Dante over there, for instance; subdue his risible muscles."

"Is that all you have to say to me?" exclaimed Mrs. Forrester, with flashing eyes. "Is that the best advice you can offer to a perplexed and distracted mind, the best balm you can provide for a stung and tortured soul? Finish my mirthful Dante, indeed! Yes, I will finish him,—behold!"

She rose from her chair, snatched the portrait from the easel, stabbed an eraser several times through Dante's abnormally cheerful countenance, and, crumpling the paper, threw it into the blazing grate. Then she rang the bell, and when the servant appeared thrust into her hands the embryonic embroidery.

"There, Mary! cut the plush in two and give half of it to cook; it will make you each a lovely bonnet next fall. And take the silks too; I'll give you some pieces to-morrow, and you can begin a crazy quilt. Let it be your lifework."

Mary began to stammer her thanks, but Mrs. Forrester cut her short and dismissed her from the

room. She bethought herself, however, to call after the retreating girl—a somewhat lavish generosity towards domestics having taught her that that class appreciate gifts exactly in proportion to their money value—that the plush was six dollars a yard. Then she looked around for fresh opportunities of iconoclasm.

"There's your *Ariadne with the Mums*," suggested Mr. Forrester, entering into his wife's spirit. "I'll help you to demolish it. It's quite in my line,—*broke her*,—see?"

He put Ariadne on the tiled hearth and glanced about in search of some weapon that might serve as the beheading axe.

"It reminds me of Hezekiah destroying the Israelites' gods; only I never cared for the things," remarked Mrs. Forrester. "No, it's more like the execution of Marie Stuart.—Ah!" as the poker neatly struck off Ariadne's head. "It's *too* realistic. I wish I hadn't let you do it, Jack!"

Jack regarded his wife with eyes that were only half amused. "I never heard of an imagination to beat yours, Bella," he observed. "Fancy detecting any resemblance between the human form divine and this thing!"

When he had reduced the statuette to fragments, he strolled aimlessly about the room for a few moments, in an undecided manner very unusual with him, casting several hesitant glances towards Mrs. Forrester, which she carefully avoided meeting. Finally he went out into the hall and put on his hat and overshoes.

"Going out, Jack?" inquired his wife, indifferently.

"Only for a little while. You do not mind, do you, dear?"

"Certainly not!"

"Allow me to give you due credit, Bella, for a decided reform in this matter recently," said Mr. Forrester, donning his overcoat. "It's not very long ago that you entered a violent protest against my ever going out in the evening. Now it doesn't seem to make the least difference to you."

"He has noticed it at last!" was Mrs. Forrester's inward thought. Aloud she said, "You are sure you like the change, Jack?"

"Of course I do!" he said, warmly. "It's a magnificent thing to feel one's marriage only a convenience and a pleasure, not a fetter!" He came in, stooped and kissed her forehead as she reclined in her chair, and went out into the rainy night.

Mrs. Forrester sat quite still where he left her, gazing into the fire with a moody, cloudy face which indicated that her mind was "plunged in a gulf of dark despair." She was, indeed, very unhappy, the more so, perhaps, because she had nothing on earth to be unhappy about; she often acknowledged to herself that if she had a real grief to meet and battle with she could never be so wretched over it as she was over her imaginary woes. She understood perfectly that her discontent sprang partly from idleness, and had for some years found relief in social duties and severe intellectual pursuits; but both these distractions had ceased for some time to interest her.

She had taken up, one after another, several occupations which delighted many of her acquaintances, and not until this evening had she admitted their futility. The project of dismissing her servants was not more senseless than a dozen others she had advocated with a view to providing employment for herself. None of these schemes, however, had afforded her any satisfaction, and to-night no attraction occurred to her sufficient to draw her eyes from the fire.

She was at that critical period of a woman's life—to which there is in the existence of a man no corresponding season of danger and difficulty—when the illusions of early youth, the novelty of marriage, the first freshness of love for her husband, have worn off, and before the reign of a peaceful, quiet maturity has begun. Many women are tided over this period by the cares of an increasing family, and their early vows of love and allegiance are strengthened by the coming of children. But Bella had never had a child; she had been an orphan since her babyhood; there was no one in particular to whom she could turn and cling; it seemed as if the end of the world had come and she was the last person in it. When her thoughts reverted to her husband, she said, impatiently, "Jack doesn't understand me!" with a sense at the same time that his not understanding her was greatly to his credit. "If he could, I should think he had gone crazy!" she averred. She herself could not analyze her feelings; she knew only that she was without strength or hope, that she had no ambition, no motive of life, no guiding principle

of conduct. She was conscious of a ceaseless unsatisfied longing, none the less real because she knew not what she longed for.

She gave herself up to these desultory musings for some time, then rose with a weary sigh, and after making the circuit of the rooms in a restless pre-occupied manner put on her rubbers and gossamer and went out on the veranda.

There were wide spaces between the neighboring houses, and she could see the city lamps stretching in a vast bright circle around her. Over the way figures flitted to and fro behind lace-draped windows; a street-car rattled and tinkled along in the distance. She felt alien to the whole multitudinous life of the city; the encircling lamps seemed to hem her in, to bar her from seeking a happier life that might lie—where? Anywhere! perhaps just beyond their fiery circle. A longing to get away from all she had ever known possessed her so fully that she had actually to put a restraint upon herself to keep from running out into the storm.

Her eyes fell upon the asphalt pavement of the street,—it looked curiously like a river to her, with its wide rain-washed surface sparkling and shining beneath the long rows of lamps; and there flashed into her mind the thought of a real river, and of a certain house upon its bank. Why should she not fly to that magnificent scene, and to the serene atmosphere of that house? She stood there thinking of it until she saw Jack hurrying up the walk.

"I suppose this ghostly black cloak makes me look like Romola?" she called, lightly. Mrs. For-

rester rarely found herself in a position to which her varied reading offered no parallel.

"You look like a naughty little girl who wants another attack of pneumonia," said her husband, with as near an approach to asperity as he ever permitted himself to apply to her. He marched her into the house and took off her waterproof and rubbers before he divested himself of his own.

"Jack," said she, firmly, as one prepared for opposition, "I have made a very strange resolution this evening. I am going to spend the summer, the whole long summer, mind you,"—a vision, whose sweetness Jack only half acknowledged, rose before him, of one hundred placid days, one hundred calm evenings, unruffled by the tears, smiles, caprices, whims, and tempers of his charming wife,—“with your cousin Diana.”

"Gracious, Bella! I thought you detested my cousin Diana."

"So I do; of course I do. But I like her as well as one woman ever does another. The main point is that I'm going there."

"In my opinion, the main point is that you are going up-stairs this minute. Your hands are icy cold, and I dare say you have taken a chill," said Mr. Forrester, with unfeigned anxiety in his tones. "Go and take a warm bath, and before you are asleep I'll bring you some hot brandy and water."

"Very well," said Bella, meekly. Half-way up-stairs she paused and reiterated, "I'm going to Diana's!"

"All right!" returned Jack. To himself he added,

as he went in search of the brandy, "And hang me if I'll be very sorry!"

A little later, when Bella sat up in bed and reluctantly sipped the contents of a steaming goblet, she said, with unwonted humility and gratitude,—

"You're too good to me, Jack; such unflagging kindness would spoil a saint.

'A woman, a spaniel, and a walnut-tree,
The more you beat 'em, the better they be.'

You should have tried the knout!"

"*Should have*, Bella? Why do you speak in the past tense? Surely it's not too late now."

"Yes, it is," declared Bella; "ages, cons too late!"

CHAPTER II.

"This is her picture as she was,—

It seems a thing to wonder on,

As if mine image in the glass

Should tarry when myself am gone."

ROSSETTI.

THAT Mrs. Forrester had firmly resolved upon doing a thing was usually a very good reason for expecting that she would not do it. It was, therefore, with incredulous eyes that her husband watched her elaborate preparations for departure, which seemed to him unnecessarily extensive and thorough. He told her she had a good deal of temerity

to go about and make formal P. P. C. calls upon all her acquaintances.

"You are going twenty miles——"

"Twenty-two, if you please," corrected Bella, who insisted that the statements of other people should be characterized by the strict accuracy which never marked her own.

"Well, twenty-two, then; and you probably will not remain away more than three days; and it really does seem absurd to make all this fuss. To judge from your impedimenta, as Cæsar calls it, you might be going to Europe."

"Ah, Jack, in one sense I am going a great deal farther than that!" said she, mysteriously. He did not comprehend her meaning any more clearly than she did herself, but he felt uncomfortable, nevertheless; he recognized that these enigmatical remarks tended to destroy domestic repose.

Bella continued to make ready for her sojourn with a singular energy and concentration of purpose. She renovated and replenished her wardrobe, there being no event with which a woman is connected, whether birth, death, marriage, or journeying, that does not afford a valid reason, or at least a plausible excuse, for this process. She discharged the housemaid and arranged for the cook to do the lessened labor of the house. She locked the piano, purchased an immense amount of fine stationery,—for she took great pride and pleasure in letter-writing,—and finally, one sunny May afternoon, all her preparations were completed, even to the assumption of her travelling dress. She had summoned her most in-

timate friend, Viviette Bromley, to share her last luncheon at home, and that repast being finished, the two sat together in the drawing-room for the few expectant minutes which always precede the coming of the carriage.

Mrs. Bromley was both in person and character a very attractive, lovable woman. She did not at all look her thirty years, and her pretty face bore no abiding traces of the bitter grief she had felt for the loss of her husband five years before. This grief still remained a fresh, unhealed wound, and her inner life was dedicated to ceaseless mourning for her dead; but the first absorbing bitterness of bereavement was past, and once more her heart was "at leisure from itself, to soothe and sympathize." She diffused a certain indefinable radiance of sweetness and light about her wherever she moved, as naturally as a flower gives forth its fragrance. She was incapable of exerting any influence other than a helpful and blessed one. Her tact was exquisite, and, while she would not sacrifice truth to flatter a friend, she had a rare and agreeable habit of saying only things which were delightfully acceptable to her interlocutor; all other topics were eliminated as by magic from her conversation. She was witty with the wit that illumines and vivifies rather than scorches and stings. Perhaps her greatest charm consisted not in the comparatively common power of making others forget themselves, but in winning them to dwell upon themselves, to unbosom to her their troubles, aspirations, and despairs, and then rewarding their confidence by comfort or encourage-

ment such as can only spring from a divinely sympathetic nature. Every person who thus confided in Mrs. Bromley felt that his interests were of vital importance in her eyes, and was thenceforward and forever her devoted friend.

She had a slight, girlish figure, dark-brown hair, and beautiful large eyes of the same color, uniformly tender and gentle in their expression. To look upon the chastened sweetness of her face was to be satisfied and at peace. Though so long a time had elapsed since her husband's death, she still wore mourning, and not even Bella, whose shafts few escaped, had ever dared to hint that this protracted adherence to the habiliments of woe was owing to their becomingness. Nevertheless the fact remains that no other attire would have been so becoming to Mrs. Bromley as her severely plain black dress, with its mute explanation of the haunting pain that sometimes made her brown eyes grow dreamy and retrospective.

"Viviette," said Mrs. Forrester, impressively, "I shall return to Buffalo either very much better—or very much worse—or not at all. I will not come back the same wretched, irresolute creature that I go. Perhaps you think"—suspiciously—"that I couldn't be very much worse?"

"On the contrary, dear, I think you couldn't be very much better," said Viviette, affectionately. "As to your not coming back at all, that possibility I refuse to contemplate."

"It's quite on the cards, I assure you," said Bella, with gloom. "And I shouldn't much mind, only I

think you would miss me,—for you do love me a little, do you not, Viviette? Now don't tell me, as Dr. Johnson did Boswell, to write down that you do and paste it where I can see it!"

"Bella, such a doubt is very painful to me," said the other, in tender reproach. "You know that I care more for you than for any one else on earth except my children!"

"I never did really doubt it, Viviette; I couldn't!" said Bella, earnestly. "But I thank you for the assurance just the same.—There's the carriage! and there's Jack!"

Mr. Forrester entered with cordial greetings to Mrs. Bromley and a kiss for his wife, to which she submitted meekly, having long since outlived one of her girlhood's dearest theories,—namely, that a kiss should be exchanged between married people only in the most sacred privacy, and that the presence of a third person at this sacramental salute was profanation. Then she turned to the window and solemnly watched the driver as he carried her trunks down the walk.

"I hate to see a heavy weight taken away out of a house," she said, pettishly. "It reminds me of such disagreeable things."

"That feeling is shared by many people," said Mrs. Bromley. "The worst of all is seeing a piano removed; you know it takes four men to carry it.—You foolish Bella, what are you shuddering about? It doesn't mean anything."

"It does in my case," insisted Bella, as the three went out to the carriage, "for I have a presentiment

that amounts to a conviction,—I shall never see my home again."

She paused on the stepping-stone and turned to gaze at the pretty house. The clematis-vines that a little later would veil the veranda from the street were already putting forth tender sprouts; dahlias and lilies, unswathed from their winter wraps, were beginning to rejoice in the spring sunshine; the little lawn, guiltless of fence, sloped greenly to her feet.

"It's a good home, and I have been very happy there," she said, quietly, no more heeding the open-mouthed driver than if he had been a fly. "But it's all over now,—I shall never see it again." She entered the carriage, and the others, following her, saw that she had lost color and that her eyes were full of tears.

"Bella, Bella! you make me tired," said her husband, in the most patient and amiable of tones. "Have you ever gone on a journey, however short and safe, without making this same melancholy prediction?"

"Don't tease her, John," said Viviette, mischievously, "or she may be tempted to justify her forebodings."

"I think myself I had better not brood over my troubles too much at Diana's," remarked Bella. "They say that people come there from all over the world to commit suicide."

"To Diana's?" queried Jack.

"Goodness, no! to the village. A lady from Chicago was at one of the hotels there a few years

ago. Suddenly she disappeared, and they found in her room a note saying she had been irresistibly impelled to seek that place for the purpose of destroying herself."

"Well, it is certainly a spot for suicide made easy," said Viviette. "Even if one goes there without any such intention at all, I think the fatal facility of the deed in itself lures people. One single plunge and the *felo-de-se* is relieved of all further responsibility."

Bella looked with troubled eyes out upon the wide, wind-swept streets through which they were rapidly rolling. "I think it's very inconsiderate of you, Viviette, to utter such melancholy prognostications," she declared, gravely. The power to soundly rate her friend was in her estimation one of the dearest privileges of their intimacy.

"Viviette never thought of prophesying anything whatever," interposed Mr. Forrester, pacifically. "No one has a more wholesome dread of death than you, Bella, who talk so lightly of it; and neither Viviette nor I would permit you to go to Diana's if we were not absolutely certain that you will keep well out of danger."

While Mrs. Bromley was warmly acquiescing in this the carriage stopped at the dépôt. Mr. Forrester bought his wife's ticket, checked her baggage, and found her a pleasant seat in the train. She looked up at him with a face of comical dismay.

"Why, it does actually seem as if I were going, after all! I never realized it until this moment!" she laughed.

"It's not too late to back out now!" said Jack.

"Did you ever know me to change my mind?" she cried, disdaining the suggestion. "There's the bell! Good-by, Jack! good-by, Viviette!" She bestowed impartial kisses upon her friend and husband, and they hurried out of the car, pausing in the *dépôt* to wave their hands at her and to watch the train move off, creeping slowly at first, increasing its speed with every rod, and finally vanishing around a curve in a flying mist of steam and smoke. Jack drew a long breath and turned to his companion.

"You will be very lonely, John," she said, with unconscious irony. "Will you dine with me at six this evening? There are no inducements."

"You and the little girls are inducements enough for me," said the gentleman, sincerely and gallantly. He accepted Mrs. Bromley's invitation with gratitude and escorted her to the carriage. When she had gone he stood a few moments on the sidewalk, glancing idly here and there. He was not irresolute,—John Forrester was never that; he simply paused the better to enjoy the singular and exquisite flavor of freedom. Though it was three o'clock in Exchange Street,—an exceptionally busy hour and locality,—though cars, carriages, and pedestrians thronged by in furious haste, it seemed to him that a great tranquillity had descended upon all things. In a word, he was afraid of his wife; he had, of course, no vulgar fear of her anger or displeasure; but he was bound to her in the slavery of the strong to the weak. He was extremely anxious to understand her moods, constantly on his guard to avoid

giving her pain, ever fearful of disappointing or annoying her in some unforeseen way. The fact that in spite of all these precautions Bella was still unhappy was the only cloud upon his sunny, prosperous existence. It was therefore with undeniable relief that he looked forward to a brief season wherein Bella's happiness would not be his especial charge; to a few days at least during which she would present no startling and unexpected demands on his patience, forbearance, and tenderness. His face was lighted with satisfaction, and as he walked up to his office the occasional nods he bestowed on acquaintances were accompanied by beaming smiles.

Mrs. Forrester, left alone, settled herself comfortably and gazed out of the window. In common with those of other people, Bella's blessings brightened as they took their flight, and at that moment she held the opinion that the airy city she was so swiftly traversing was the most delightful abode on earth. The route lay for a little distance along the beach of Lake Erie; Bella had often passed there on stormy autumn days when the wind-tossed waters were dashed against the car windows, but to-day tiny wavelets lapped peacefully against the stones of the breakwater, and the wide expanse of the lake danced and glittered under a gentle breeze. A little farther on the lake melted imperceptibly into the broad, blue, majestic Niagara River. On its opposite bank lay the sleepy little village of Fort Erie, with its picturesque windmill and long rows of poplar-trees; the ferry-boat was steaming diagonally across the rapid current. The train slipped by "The

Front," one of the most beautiful of the city parks, on whose green slope children were playing, and then glided along in the shadow of the historic bluff, its summit crowned with the gray ruins of Fort Porter. Bella glanced at the lumbering canal-boats, and wondered if any romance could possibly be connected with one of them; her eyes dwelt appreciatively on the slender emerald length of Squaw Island; the willows and elder bushes growing on it seemed almost to spring from the bosom of the river, so slight was their foothold of earth. A little later, out in the open country, viridescent fields alternated with mile after mile of rosy peach-orchards; every tree was a light and fluttering cloud of delicate pink, and even the twigs, full of fresh-running sap, were a dark yet vivid red. Bella raised the window to inhale the sweet almond-like odor; she felt indistinctly that she would be perfectly contented if she could always have a blossoming peach orchard to look at.

She herself was rather pleasant to look upon, although her habitual dissatisfaction with all things of course included her personal appearance, and she considered her own face and form to be utterly unattractive. She was of medium height, with a well-rounded figure which only the most ill-natured of her acquaintances deemed too plump. She had a great quantity of auburn hair, whose very luxuriance was a source of annoyance to her, and a bloomy complexion that yet retained, in spite of her twenty-seven years, its pretty childish way of changing constantly from pink to white and back again. She had

gray-blue eyes, good teeth, a ready and engaging smile, and a general air of health and well-being which, however trying to a young woman posing as a martyr, was yet extremely admirable in the eyes of an unprejudiced observer.

Her attire was invariably selected with a taste that amounted to absolute art. It might be inexpensive, unfashionable, or even careless, but it was always becoming. She had a fine sense of color, not only instinctive, but also carefully trained, and it was one of her delights (this grief-stricken creature had a surprising number of them, after all!) that the beauty of color was so universal.

"It's a beauty that's always to be seen!" she was accustomed to say with enthusiasm. "You can't raise your eyes without encountering it. If everything else fails, there's the sky!"

She brought this skill in chromatics to her aid in choosing her gowns, and never wore an unlovely hue in silk or velvet, wool or cotton. A patch on a poor woman's calico dress was a far less offensive sight to her than the line of brilliant yellow silk which so many misguided blondes wear in the neck of their seal-skin jackets, thereby quite overpowering whatever little gold their hair might otherwise boast. That any woman should be so ignorant, so lost to her own interests, as not even to lay her ungloved hand upon a piece of goods whose purchase she was contemplating, was a fact utterly beyond Bella's comprehension.

On this sunny May afternoon she wore a brown woollen dress and a brown straw hat; the latter was

surmounted by a plumassary of golden and reddish brown tints, some of which exactly matched her hair, while others accentuated its lights and shadows. She carried a brown shopping-bag and umbrella, and held in her hand the inevitable French novel, which, however, could not win her gaze from the heaven-blue river.

The railway, after coquettishly approaching and retreating from the stream several times, finally returned to it for good and ran along its bank. The river at this point is apparently as smooth as a lake, and its treacherous surface offers no indication of danger. Bella watched it thoughtfully until the village intervened and the brakeman shouted,—

“Niagara Falls!”

CHAPTER III.

“How happy is he born and taught
That serveth not another's will;
Whose armor is his honest thought,
And simple truth his utmost skill!
Whose passions not his masters are,
Whose soul is still prepared for death;
Untied unto the worldly care
Of public fame or private breath!”

SIR HENRY WOTTON.

THE most noticeable thing about the slender young lady who met Mrs. Forrester as she descended from the train was that she was attired in the height of style and the perfection of good taste.

This is no small distinction in an age and country where every one dresses well. She was apparently not moved to any agitation or eagerness by the arrival of her cousin's wife, and merely said, in cool, even tones,—

"How do you do, Bella?"

"How do you do, Diana? I suppose we ought to kiss, but as the children say, 'Let's don't!'"

"Very well," said Miss Forrester. "Give me your checks, if you haven't lost them, and I will see about having your trunks sent home."

She attended to this, and to several other little matters about the dépôt, in the calm, unhurried manner habitual to her, while Bella stood in the door-way watching the passers-by. Many of these were evidently tourists, who gave to the pretty little town a factitious appearance of wealth and elegant leisure. Bella formulated on the instant a theory that she could distinguish the visitors from the residents by the superior elevation of expression to be found in the faces of the latter.

"To live all their lives within sight and sound of that magnificent work of God! Surely it must not only ennoble the mind, it must chisel into the very flesh a grandeur akin to its own!"

But after carefully scanning a score of countenances, she was forced to abandon her fancy, concluding that the children were no more cherubic, the maidens no more seraphic, the middle-aged men and women no less careworn and given to the things of this world, than those of other communities. Miss Forrester, having transacted her business, now

came out, followed her guest into the low basket phaeton, took up the lines, and drove away.

"We shouldn't have had nearly so far to drive," she remarked, in a tone distantly suggestive of reproach, "and it would have been a great saving of time——"

"You are always so anxious to save time, Diana!" the other interrupted. "My only object on earth is to get rid of it."

"If you had gone on in the train to the next station, Suspension Bridge," continued Miss Forrester. "But I knew you wouldn't, so I came here."

"No, of course I wouldn't," said Bella, decidedly. "And it's always a wonder to me that other people can rush right by Niagara Falls. I think, whatever their errands, they ought to pause here a little space, and make at least in their hearts a mute reverence to the glory and the beauty of this spot, as a Catholic bows to the altar before he leaves the church!"

Miss Forrester turned and regarded her cousin's wife as if she were an unsolvable riddle. "You are as full of your queer ideas as ever, Bella," she said, tolerantly.

"Do you call that an idea, Diana? It's very kind of you, I'm sure."

Diana was silent a moment. She was one of those unfortunate persons whose words, though never deliberately offensive, yet never by any chance produce other than a disagreeable effect. She was dimly conscious of this fatality of speech, and was always making feeble and futile efforts to overcome it. She made one now.

"And you are looking as blooming and jolly as ever, Bella!"

Now, no woman ever lived who liked to be called jolly, and even the complimentary epithet blooming was distasteful to Bella, implying as it did an enjoyment of life which it was her constant endeavor to disclaim.

"Diana, you're too hateful!" she exclaimed, softening her words by a smile. "You *know* I prefer to be called pining. I'm simply wretched, and I like to look so. Do you suppose that if I had possessed the smallest measure of contentment in Buffalo I would have come down here?"

"Well," said Diana, inhospitably, "it's perfectly inexplicable to me why you *have* come."

"It's equally so to me, I assure you," returned Bella. "But I'll try to explain my mental condition to you, Diana, so far as I comprehend it myself. I am in a very morbid state; really, I think I should have had a brain fever this spring, only, as Jack said, I hadn't enough brains to have it with. Nothing seems a desirable thing to do, to see, to know. The sources of action are dead in me."

Miss Forrester heard these symptoms with profound interest. "It sounds as if you were going crazy," she observed.

"Yes; that's what I feared. At last I thought of you, Diana. I thought your society would prove a tonic to me. You know you will not pet and indulge me as Jack does. And it will be good for me, too, to spend the summer listening to the leonine roar of the great cataract; it will make

me realize my own littleness and think less about myself."

"Yes," assented Miss Forrester. After a pause she added, dubiously, "But you know, Bella, we cannot actually hear the noise of the Falls in my house."

"The principle is just the same," declared Bella. "Did it never occur to you, Diana, that even as that tremendous sweep of limpid water must purify the circumambient air, so too it must exalt and vivify its moral and intellectual surroundings?"

"No," said Diana, emphatically, "it most certainly never occurred to me." And she secretly rejoiced that she was undisturbed by any such chimerical reflections.

A space of silence ensued; for, contrary to all established traditions, these two women were capable of protracted periods of utter speechlessness. Each sincerely liked the other, yet found it quite impossible to thoroughly understand and respect her, and whenever their clashing opinions imperilled harmony they were accustomed to resort to a policy of absolute quiet, which was only broken after the lapse of some minutes by the introduction of a more peaceful subject.

Miss Forrester was a type of the large and constantly increasing class of young American women who do not marry, not because they have no opportunities, but simply because they do not wish to do so. Time was when the unmarried woman of mature years was represented in novels and dramas as being imbued with a frantic desire to take unto herself a mate; but if any similar portraiture are given

to the world nowadays, be assured they are false and wholly foreign to the spirit of the age. A school-teacher once wittily remarked that she would not exchange a sixty-dollar position for a ten-dollar man, and in a lower grade of society, a pretty little housemaid being chidden by her mistress for not rewarding an ardent and faithful swain by the bestowal of her hand, said, naïvely, "Ah, yes, ma'am, I know I could have as good a husband as ever lived if I was willing to take in washing!" Women of all conditions are in these practical days competent to thus dispassionately consider the relative advantages of single and wedded life to a degree which was undreamed of fifty years ago, and with results so unfavorable to marriage that the entire extinction of the race is quite predicable from this cause.

While the existence of a husband would not have been so inimical to Miss Forrester's pecuniary interests as to those of many women, she yet saw no reason why she should admit a clumsy and probably untidy man into the privacy of her pretty home. She had no slightest conception of the subtle, irresistible attraction towards one of the other sex which makes marriage—with whatever vista of future poverty, neglect, and disappointment—the most natural and inevitable thing in life. Whether she would ever meet the one man who could make this seem possible to her was an open question.

She was the fortunate possessor of an exquisitely slim, girlish figure of medium height, equally far removed from angularity or redundancy. Her complexion was of a clear, transparent pallor seldom

illuminated by a flush of color ; her eyes were large, brown, and of a deceptive softness and timidity, and her hands and feet were delicately small. Her manner was refreshingly simple and direct, and she had kept till now, in her thirty-first year, a marvellous candor and childlikeness of expression, chiefly because she had been subjected to only one aging influence,—that of Time, who is always slow to put a destroying finger on the facial beauties which illness, anxiety, thought, and sin have never molested. Miss Forrester's serene existence had been devoid of trouble, and she was by nature incapable of entering into the woes of others,—she had read "The New-comes," and had not cried over the Colonel's death, which is a convincing proof of her insensibility. Her detractors said that the placid youthfulness of her countenance was but the external reflection of an inactive mind and an unimpressible spirit ; still, the fact remained that she looked young.

Although Miss Forrester possessed all the attractions above enumerated, she was surprisingly free from their correlative blemish, vanity. She never opened her wide brown eyes to their fullest extent, nor slightly projected a dainty kid boot from beneath her dress, nor practised a spell akin to Vivien's "charm of waving hands" because of the whiteness and fragility of those members. These and similar tricks of manner which render the charms of some women a burden to their friends were unknown to Miss Forrester. She was not, however, devoid of the equally absorbing if less immediately personal vanity of dress. She was intensely devoted to her

clothes, and expended upon them hours of mental application and large amounts of money, asking nothing in return save that they should be stylish and pretty. Diana did not even demand of her numerous integuments that they should heighten her own attractiveness; their intrinsic beauty sufficed for her. There are many women of this stamp, who are less concerned over a line in the cheek than a wrinkle in the corsage. Perhaps, though, this is because the one is unavoidable, while the other is not.

It was as well for strangers not to inquire too closely into Miss Forrester's pedigree, for the subject was fraught with some embarrassment to even that calm and self-poised young lady. The identity of her progenitors was involved in the densest obscurity, and this circumstance had caused the only anxiety and pain her unruffled life had known. Even this was not a source of serious trouble to her, for while an imaginative girl might have tortured herself with the fear that her infant slumbers were induced by some such malison as Charles Lamb has perpetuated, or have revelled in the proud belief that her remote ancestors were Crusaders and the more immediate ones dukes and earls, Diana took a middle course, and held that her origin might probably be traced, were it worth while to attempt the task, to persons poor but eminently respectable, who, dying of an epidemic within a few hours of each other, had bequeathed their baby girl to their benefactor, Mr. Marcy Forrester. The one thing that made this simple hypothesis untenable

was the extreme difficulty of imagining Mr. Marcy Forrester in the light of a benefactor.

This gentleman, who was Diana's guardian, however he became so, had placed her in a New England boarding-school at the tender age of three months, and had paid without a murmur the large charges which the keeping of the infant necessitated. Here Diana remained—being one of those docile creatures who "stay put"—not only until she graduated at twenty, but for two years longer, pursuing special studies in botany and in designing. At last, however, her patience was exhausted, and she wrote a somewhat peremptory letter to her guardian, who had occasionally visited the school during the progress of his ward's education, demanding some variation of her monotonous life. To this very reasonable requisition Mr. Forrester promptly responded by arranging for her to accompany a wealthy and cultured family of his acquaintance on a three years tour through Europe. At its conclusion he sought an interview with Diana, in which he informed her that failing health compelled him to abandon the gay, nomadic, bachelor's existence he had led so long, and that he proposed to establish a peaceful home for his declining years. Would she grace that home with her gentle presence, as his own daughter might have done? She would, and did, and the house which Mr. Forrester purchased upon the American bank of Niagara River, a mile or so below the Whirlpool, owed to Diana during the short period in which she was its mistress an elegance and precision in its appointments to which it

never thereafter attained. Diana was soon shocked by the laxity of her guardian's views, and weary of the struggle with his lifelong habits of idleness and untidiness; Mr. Forrester was simultaneously weary of the severe and impeccable young woman whose like he had religiously avoided all his days, and shocked at his fatuity in burdening himself with such a companion. Therefore it will readily be seen that it was a very easy thing to effect a separation at the end of a year. Diana accepted from her attached guardian a small tract of land, adjoining his own grounds, and proceeded to build a house upon it. Mr. Forrester breathed freely once more; cigars, pipes, bottles, began to appear everywhere, and objectionable French novels were scattered about in the unrebuked confusion dear to their owner's ill-regulated mind.

Diana tasted the full enjoyment—never, alas! unmixed with perplexity and disappointment—to be found in planning, building, and furnishing a house. She designed her fireplace, and her door and window of stained glass, and embroidered her portières with her own hands, and when all the work was accomplished she felt justly proud of it. She had lived there five years now, long enough for the cultivation of a profusion of vines and shrubs upon the lawn, and of a small garden in the rear of the house. Beyond this garden was a narrow space of earth covered with evergreens and willow trees, which ended abruptly at the very verge of a sheer precipice of three hundred feet, along whose base the river ran sullenly, only just recovering quiet after its

awful tumultuous passage through the Whirlpool. One might look from the road upon the pretty little house wreathed by the budding vines and darkly framed by the pines beyond, without ever suspecting that a careless walk at nightfall under those trees might result in complete bodily annihilation.

"How lovely the place is looking!" said Bella, as the horse came to a halt before it. "Do you realize, Diana, that we've not spoken a word for two miles? I'm glad that we both can exercise the golden gift of silence. When one is thinking deeply a chance interruption may leave the mind untuned for hours, may break a precious train of reflection that no earthly power can ever cause to be resumed. Isn't it so?"

"I don't know. I don't think my reflections have ever seemed particularly precious to me," said Diana, dubiously, as she secured the horse to await the coming of Mr. Forrester's servant, who twice a day brought his master's phaeton over for Miss Forrester's use, and twice a day came to take it away. Then she led the way up to the house, and, turning on the threshold, said, with simple cordiality, "Welcome, Bella! I hope you will spend a pleasant summer here."

"I know I shall," said Bella, following her hostess in-doors. The hall was unique, picturesque, and of extravagantly large dimensions. A stranger would certainly have inferred from its size that he was entering quite a palatial residence instead of a little frame house. The mural decorations and the draperies were chiefly blue and olive; the walls were

further enriched by several good pictures. The hall was comfortably furnished, and lacked not easy-chairs and a lounge. The stairs ascended in one corner; half-way up they made an abrupt turn, and the little square landing thus formed was illuminated by a tiny circular window of brilliant stained glass, to which Diana referred as a rose, a marigold, or a Catherine-wheel window, according to the degree of conversance with ecclesiastical architecture she supposed her interlocutor to possess. The effect of this little window, with the sun shining full upon it, was as of a bright and cheery greeting.

The parlor, on the right of the hall, was entered through a wide door-way hung with portières which presented a dull blue surface to the hall and a warm crimson to the parlor, for this latter room was furnished in crimson and olive; whatever was not of one or the other of these two colors was of a hue distantly related to them. There was a piano, a spirited bronze horse and rider on the mantel-shelf, and there was in the fireplace of Diana's designing a fire whose merry sparkle seemed to repeat the kindly welcome of the little rose window. Books there were in plenty, for Diana read a good deal, albeit in that perfunctory way which makes reading a duty not a delight; and the room also contained a sufficiency of pictures and pretty chairs and plush wall-banners. Beyond was the dining-room, redeemed from commonplaceness by a rather singular sideboard designed by Miss Forrester in order to display to the greatest advantage about thirty china plates painted by herself. There was, besides, an

absurd corner-cupboard, also of original design, in which the mistress of the house kept, carefully guarded, several decanters of the very choicest home-made blackberry wine.

Bella walked into the parlor, hesitated a moment between two arm-chairs,—one olive relieved by crimson, the other *vice versa*,—chose the former as being more in harmony with her complexion, and sank into it.

"Yes, I shall certainly be contented here," she murmured. "Here adverse influences can find no admission; they cannot tear and rend and make of no avail our hopes, our purposes, our carefully gleaned grains of knowledge."

"Yes, it's very quiet here," responded Diana, abstractedly. Then, with animation, "That hat suits you well enough, Bella, but it hasn't a bit of style!"

CHAPTER IV.

"Here health returns in sickness;
And mirth returns in heaviness;
Town in desert, forest in plain,—
All earthly joy returns in pain."

WILLIAM DUNBAR.

SIXTY years before the date of this chronicle, when Buffalo was but a straggling hamlet not yet fully recovered from the severe scorching it had received at the hands of the British a decade previous, a young man named Forrester who owned a small farm on

the outskirts of the village had said of his two little sons,—

“Marcy is bound to succeed in life; John is equally bound to fail.”

This prophecy, based on the yielding gentleness of the one and the indomitable greed and selfishness of the other, had, from a worldly point of view, been fulfilled. John lived a quiet, humble life, and the traditional wolf always prowled uncomfortably near his door. He married for love a tender, timid little thing as poor as himself and correspondingly ill adapted for battling with the world. Both wearied early of the struggle for existence and gave it up in despair in the very prime of their age, bequeathing to their only son and heir a few books, some worthless old furniture, and a quantity of debts sufficient to swamp the boat of almost any young voyager along the river of time. It certainly seemed at first as if John Forrester, Junior, were to follow in his father's unlucky footsteps, especially as he also complicated his difficulties by marrying a dreamy, visionary young girl whose chief characteristic was a colossal and amazing incapacity for doing anything useful. He attempted the practice of law, but soon recognizing his unfitness for it, he wisely resolved to abandon it, and boldly entered the golden fields of speculation, with such fortunate results that very soon Bella's ignorance of domestic duties was supplemented by the skill of trained servants, and her husband's digestion was no longer imperilled by toxical compounds of her preparation.

Marcy Forrester, on the other hand, had com-

passed every object of his ambition, such as these objects were. He had not cared to win power, distinction, immense wealth, or any of the earthly prizes for which men commonly strive much harder than for the heavenly ones. He had simply wanted to enjoy himself, and for the space of half a century he did so to the utmost. As he expressed it, he condensed at least one hundred years of man's ordinary living into half that number. At an early stage in his career he mastered several means of procuring the first and most indispensable requirement of a voluptuary's life,—money,—which means, if often questionable, were at all events successful. Having soon exhausted the somewhat limited opportunities for pleasures lawful and otherwise afforded by his native town, he left it for the older and wickeder civilization of Europe, and while John Forrester was treading the thorny path of ill-paid industry in Buffalo, his brother Marcy skipped lightly along the primrose path of dalliance in various foreign cities, excelling the natives of each one in the particular form of dissipation which was its own peculiar boast. This brilliant series of triumphs came to an abrupt end one night at Monaco, after a long and exciting evening during which he had astonished the by-standers by play equally rash and lucky. He attempted to take up the heap of gold and notes he had won, but his hand refused to obey him; he would have sprung to his feet in bewildered rage, but he could not; he tried to utter an impotent curse,—instead, the muscles of his face contracted in a grotesque laugh. They carried him away, some

one took his place, and the trivial incident was soon forgotten. But it is highly improbable that all the pleasure of Marcy Forrester's life counterbalanced the anguish of mind he endured that night and for many nights and days thereafter. When the thought of death had been unavoidably thrust upon him he had always put it aside with an optimistic faith that it would come to him suddenly, mercifully, in the fulness of time, when he should be just a little weary of his long care-free life, and almost ready to relinquish it. He never dreamed of this,—that he should be stricken down in middle life by a malady which left him, to all intents and purposes, an unburied corpse, in the world but no longer of it. Vainly the physicians endeavored to reassure him; he foresaw that henceforth he must "sit like his grandsire carved in alabaster," and never again be as he had been.

This melancholy foreboding was confirmed upon his celebrating his complete recovery by imbibing about one-fifteenth of his former allowance of champagne, for even this mild indulgence so stimulated the over-wrought heart and irritated the diseased nerves that a second attack of paralysis supervened. As usual, the relapse was more dangerous than the first illness, and it was the mere wreck and shadow of himself that six months later tottered aboard an American-bound steamer.

He had never burdened himself with a wife, averring that he admired women too much collectively to devote himself to one, but now he longed for the feminine sympathy and petting that lightens the

dreariest invalidism. It was at this juncture he bought the house on the river-bank and persuaded Diana to adorn it with her presence. He probably owed so much of health as he regained to her strict surveillance of his food, drink, exercise, and hours of retirement, for which he was just as grateful as might be expected; he took a violent dislike to her, and when she departed to her own house his only emotion was one of unqualified relief.

His solitude was sometimes enlivened by the visits of his former companions, whom he invariably either envied or despised, according as their physical condition was better or worse than his own. He suddenly developed a fondness for literature, read a great deal in several languages, and was writing his *Memoirs*, in whose pages he lived over again his selfish, aimless, vapid life, which was, after all, illuminated by one good deed.

Spending a day or so in Buffalo while negotiating for the purchase of his house he had naturally looked up his nephew, whom he had never seen. He was pleased with the young fellow, and so charmed with Bella that instead of obeying his first impulse to sneer at John's modest efforts in speculation, he actually assisted him with advice and even with the sinews of war itself. This was the beginning of the young man's good fortune, and was the cause of much self-laudation on his uncle's part.

Bella and Marcy Forrester from that time kept up a vigorous correspondence on a wide range of topics. When he was settled in his new home he invited her to visit him and make Diana's acquaintance. The

two young women immediately became friends after a fashion, and ever after, when Bella's own home was for any reason distasteful to her, she was accustomed to take refuge in Diana's.

"I must run over this evening and see Uncle Marcy, Diana," she said, as they sat together in the early dusk on the first day of her visit. "He will think it very strange and unkind if I do not."

"You are not always so careful of people's feelings," commented Diana.

"No," said Bella, "I admit it. But he is different. It's pathetic to see that old man sinking into his grave hated by all who know him, and I wouldn't for worlds disabuse him of the notion that I at least love him."

"You should not permit him to take comfort in a falsity, an absurdity," said Diana. "You do not love him."

"Certainly I do not; but I pity him and I understand him, which is more than you are able to do, Diana."

"Thank heaven, yes!" said Diana. "And I may add that I have the poorest opinion of any one who prides herself upon understanding Marcy Forrester."

According to the usual custom of these prudent young women when their conversation threatened to become tinged with bitterness, they permitted a sudden silence to supervene, and it was not until Bella had put on her hat and wrap that Diana spoke again.

"Shall I send some one with you, Bella?"

"No, thanks; I prefer to walk over alone, and

Uncle Marcy will see that I get home all right. Is there any message I can take to him,—your love, for instance?"

Diana gave her a glance of emphatic negation. "But you may tell him I heard he was smoking three cigars a day, and I advise him to stop it."

"Very well, I'll tell him," said Bella.

There were two ways of going to Mr. Forrester's,—by the road upon which both houses faced, or by a path in their rear. Bella chose the latter route, and passing through the little garden, just waking up after its winter sleep, she turned into the path and strolled slowly onward. On one hand were the odorous peach orchards, on the other was the belt of lofty pines. Once or twice Bella took a few cautious steps beneath the trees and looked into the gorge below, but the daylight was so nearly gone that her gaze encountered only a dark mysterious depth. No sound was audible save the faint sighing of the breeze among the pines; it was soothing rather than melancholy, and Bella thought it a far sweeter lullaby than the sound of the sea.

When she reached the wide lawn behind Mr. Forrester's residence, she saw that two people, a man and a woman, awaited her on the back veranda. They were Mr. Forrester's servants, and therefore objects of compassion to every feeling heart. Quickening her pace a little, Bella ran up the steps and greeted them warmly.

"How do you do, Gretchen? how do you do, Fritz?" She came to a dubitative pause. When she had last seen her uncle's servitors they were clad in the strik-

ingly picturesque costume of Bavarian peasants, and had been trained to answer to the congruous names she had uttered. But now the man wore the dark-blue blouse and trousers of a French *ouvrier*, and the woman's attire was that of a Parisian *bonne*,—full black skirts, white cap and apron, and modest white kerchief, upon which a large gold cross glittered.

"How air yez, Mrs. Forrester?" said the woman, cordially. "We're French now, an' by the same token ye'll plaze to call us Fleep an' Slest."

Bella laughed. What outward adornments of Gallic or Teutonic fashion could for one instant disguise the nationality of the speaker?

"I think you are very lucky in the change," said she. "These clothes are nicer than the last ones,—quieter in style, you know."

"Much more daycint altogether," acquiesced the man. "Arrah, Mrs. Forrester, we're glad to have yez come down to brighten up the ould gentleman a bit. It's harrud on yez, but it's a mighty relafe to us!"

The two smiled at her in sincere pleasure. Bella was touched by a subtle suggestion in their plain middle-aged faces that smiles were infrequent visitors there. She talked with them a few moments, then went alone into the house, which, without being a mansion, was yet of good size. The main hall was a large square room, in which all manner of Asiatic and European curios consorted together oddly enough. On one side of the hall were spacious parlors shrouded in darkness; opposite was the library, and in this room sat Mr. Forrester, reading.

Bella's interview with the servants had prepared her to find him wearing garments totally unlike the antique German ones in which she had last beheld him. One of the courtiers who fluttered around Louis XVI. before the evil days came upon that hapless monarch might have worn the identical costume in which Marcy Forrester was this evening arrayed,—knee-breeches and full-skirted coat of black velvet, long waistcoat of yellow satin richly embroidered in silver, yellow silk stockings, low shoes with diamond buckles, and lace ruffles falling over the delicate ivory-tinted hands. A snowy wig tied in a queue covered his head and gave a quaint setting to his keen old face, faintly yellowish like his hands. His black eyes still flashed with some of their pristine fire, and his features were of that regular type which is unchangeably fine to the end. Weariness and pain rather than time had traced the many lines upon his face, whose customary expression of wretchedness not even his delight at Bella's visit could obscure.

She came forward, and they shook hands warmly; her commiseration for him had never prompted her to encourage any avuncular caresses, nor, to do him justice, had he ever presumed to offer any.

"My dear child! is there really any prospect of your making more than one of your usual flying visits to us?" were his first words, spoken with—for him—very unusual eagerness.

"Indeed, yes; this is only May, and I don't think even October will find me in Buffalo."

"God be praised!" said the old man, devoutly.

"I'm glad enough to see any one in this cursed hole," he continued, in peevish tones which ill befitted the courtly dignity of his attire, "and I'm more glad to see you, Bella, than any one else on earth."

"You are very good to say so," returned Bella, taking a chair near him,—a low one, that the rays of the student-lamp might shine full upon her bright face and dark ruddy hair. She was too considerate to seat herself in shadow, where his aging eyes could but partially discern her lineaments.

"I am engaged, Bella, in a diversion which I know you will like," observed Mr. Forrester. "I am trying to realize in my own mind the pre-revolutionary period of France; I fancy myself one of the old nobility whose greed, extortion, and cruelty were the natural prelude to the Reign of Terror. And by Jove, Bella! I haven't the least difficulty in entering into the spirit of the time!"

Bella could well believe it, looking with an inward shudder at the hard malicious face before her; but she merely shook her head and said, lightly,—

"Your diversion doesn't appear very charming to me, Uncle Marcy."

"No? Just wait till you see the gown I've had made for you,—lace, brocade, and everything else that can bewitch the feminine soul."

"That sounds alluring," admitted Bella. "And what is it you wish me to do in this wonderful gown?"

"Why, we'll read all the old authors together; we'll recite scenes from the old comedies; we'll essay

the *minuet de la cour* to the sound of Philippe's violin," he explained. "Though it's a shame no one should see you in your powder and diamonds but an old fossil like me. But perhaps it will tax your patience too severely?"

"Not at all; the patience is yours. Think what good practice in French it will be for me," said Bella, sweetly. "Only I dare say my dress is an outrageous combination of Queen Anne and La Pompadour, and we shall be living anachronisms in this modern room. You are getting careless in your reproduction of other times and climes, Uncle Marcy: when you chose to be a mandarin a year ago you were so very Chinese you actually tried to eat with chopsticks."

"Yes, I fancy I carried out the Celestial idea pretty thoroughly," was the complacent response. "I enjoyed it. The costume did not lack dignity so much as grace and convenience. But I could do nothing with my last attempt; my mind lacks the stolidity, my figure the rotundity necessary to the proper personation of a German."

"I'm sure you needn't regret it," observed Bella.

"I've never done anything I like so much as this present pursuit," the old gentleman continued. "And I hadn't the usual difficulty in reconciling the servants to their habiliments. Philippe said he could stand anything after the yellow cross-garters I made him wear all winter. Celeste objected a little to the Normandy cap, but I bribed her with the gift of an immense gold cross. Diana said she was surprised at my generosity."

"It's not for me to be surprised at any kindness of yours," said Bella.

"However, the cross isn't much more gold than Celeste is French," he chuckled. "I've had the parlors refitted. I sent all the Japanese cabinets, idols, screens, and vases to New York, and exchanged them for furniture and draperies in strict accordance with the canons of Louis Seize. I was devilish tired of it, too,—there's a frightful poverty of idea, of imagination, in Japanese art. It has truth, fidelity, I grant; but what does that amount to? It's better to be false to a high ideal than faithful to a low one. That reminds me,—how is John? Is he still as far as ever from being finely touched to any fine issue?"

"John is all right," said John's wife, shortly, half angry, half amused at this old reprobate's grand talk of ideals and fine issues. "Did you get any veritable French antiques, Uncle Marcy?"

"No, child, no; where is one to find antiques in America? But I didn't care for them; all my life I've been a sham, surrounded by shams, delighting in them, and I don't see but what in the long run they are just as good as the real articles!"

"You have no right to say that, Uncle Marcy!" said Bella, a little sharply. "You have no more experience of the real things of this life than a cripple has of skating!"

"How long since you set up for an apostle of the good, the true, and the beautiful, Mrs. Bella?" sneered the old man. "I dare say you have known some genuine emotion; would you not rather have died a

child than have lived to meet the awful fate of every woman who really loves,—disillusion?"

"Oh," laughed Bella, recovering her temper, "if I could be born again, I wouldn't choose to be a woman at all; I'd be a man, and I'd drink and gamble and commit all manner of sins till I was fifty. Then I'd reform."

"Yes, that's all very well," said Mr. Forrester, in whom these words probably roused fond reminiscences; "only you wouldn't live to be fifty."

"*You* did, though!" said Bella, saucily.

"True; but not long after!" said he. "You mustn't say such things, my dear; it shocks me, literally shocks even me, to hear you say you would like to live such a life as mine. You know nothing about it; you have no data to judge from."

"I am unsophisticated," said Bella, "yet I think that I can understand your life, Uncle Marcy, for though of course I've never exactly been wicked, still I always feel as if I were just going to be!"

At this speech Marcy Forrester threw himself back in his chair and laughed,—laughed so immoderately that Philippe and Celeste in the kitchen hailed it as the dawn of a brighter era. Bella, who had not in the least meant to be funny, rose and put on her wrap.

"Come to-morrow, my dear child," said Mr. Forrester, cordially, still very much amused. "It gives me a new lease of life to know that anything has power to make me laugh so. Philippe will escort you home. Good-night."

When she walked into Diana's parlor, half an hour

later, that young lady glanced up from her diligent perusal of Buckle's "History of Civilization" to inquire,—

"Have you been bored?"

"Not at all," said Bella. She mused a moment. "The fact is, Diana, I recognize a subtle kinship between Uncle Marcy's spirit and mine."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" said Diana, severely.

CHAPTER V.

"Let each man think himself an act of God,
His mind a thought, his life a breath of God;
And let each try, by great thoughts and good deeds,
To show the most of heaven he hath in him."

BAILEY.

"We've made pretty fair time to-day, haven't we, Harvey?"

"No, we have not; we've made just as poor time as the law allows. I hate that senseless optimism of yours, Brooks, that keeps saying, 'Good, good!' when there is no good."

Brooks laughed. "The habit of looking on the bright side of any event is worth a thousand pounds a year," he quoted.

"That's not my opinion," said Harvey. "Such a habit usually implies a cowardly evasion of the actual facts of the case: a man given to it never dares admit honestly, bravely, that anything is a misfortune; no, he palters and shuffles and lies even to himself!"

Brooks, thus rebuked, laughed again as he lighted a cigar, while Harvey traversed the length of the smoking-car where this conversation was held, with the incertitude of step incident to such a promenade. These two companions were both men in the early thirties, both New-Yorkers, and both unmarried; but there all resemblance ended. It was impossible to look into Jerome Harvey's deep-set gray eyes without seeing that he was a man who lived in earnest. He held himself accountable for every word, deed, and thought; he had never lain down to sleep without the knowledge that in the day just past he had done, or had at least tried to do, something to make the world better. He cared nothing for the future or the past; he lived wholly in the present hour,—not for its enjoyments but for its duties. He had never known a passion and scarcely an affection; this, however, perhaps arose from certain restraining circumstances of his life rather than from innate coldness. His disposition was gentle and amiable, and few persons had Stephen Brooks's power of rousing him to displays of irritability and impatience.

He was extremely tall, and carried himself with the unconscious and pardonable pride which is the inevitable component of remarkable stature in a man. He was of a sinewy, athletic build, without an ounce of superfluous flesh on his frame. He had that rarest embellishment of young American men, a fine head of hair, which lay in thick, soft brown waves above a broad white forehead. His features were good, and his earnest eyes seemed to grow in beauty and im-

pressiveness with every year of his life. The whole effect of his physiognomy was grave, stern, almost solemn, and as he paced up and down the car Brooks said to himself for the thousandth time,—

"Harvey is more than ever like an austere young monk of the Middle Ages. It's easy to fancy him in a brown serge gown, knotted about the waist with his scourge, walking bare-footed from Paris to Rome as a penance. Now, the only members of a holy brotherhood *I* resemble are those degenerate fellows who chiefly delighted in holding the keys of the wine-cellar; who liked to spend long warm days fishing in the monastic ponds, or lying under the oaks with a pipe in their mouths. That is to say, they doubtless would have been smoking if tobacco had been given to humanity in their day. Although I'm literary, I don't suppose any one would ever compare me to the pale student monks who bent over desks in their gloomy cells illuminating mis-sals."

As he had said, Mr. Brooks was literary. But as we moderns, when we hear the expression "old maid" instinctively call to mind a brisk, well-dressed, money-making woman instead of the dejected creature who formerly laid unwilling claim to that title, so the writer of to-day does not spend all his days poring over dusty tomes to the neglect of his person and manners, but must be a busy man of the world, interested in everything, going everywhere, drawing his inspiration from society rather than books. Such a writer was Stephen Brooks. He did a good deal of vigorous journalistic work, and could turn

off graceful verses and bright stories as easily as a spider spins silk. It is often said that no class of cultured people read so little as writers do, but this charge was not true of Mr. Brooks. He read omnivorously and enjoyed every book that he read, being alike delighted with the dainty conceits of Herrick, the grossness of Congreve, or the sublimity of Milton.

It was, however, in literature only that he possessed this ready sympathy and comprehension. He could not understand the better impulses which actuated his fellow-men, nor, in truth, did he greatly care to do so. The motives of Jerome Harvey's life in particular had been a puzzle to him ever since they were children. He did not, like Don Quixote fighting the windmills, set himself to combating the evil tendencies of the age; he thought it simply fatuous to erect an impossible standard of virtue and then to exhaust one's self in perpetual futile endeavors to live up to it. He had the poorest opinion of mankind, Stephen Brooks included, and this opinion his own conduct constantly tended to confirm rather than to alter. Women he regarded as immeasurably the inferiors of men, and of his own mother, a household saint "oftener upon her knees than on her feet," he had once said,—

"I know nothing about her girlhood and youth. Of course she is good now; at fifty, what else is left for a woman?"

The remark was made when he and Jerome were little more than boys, and the latter had promptly knocked him down for it. This was the only in-

stance where the hostile calm of their relations was broken by a blow.

Stephen Brooks was not so tall as his friend, but, on the other hand, he was slightly heavier. His closely-cropped hair was black, his skin a clear brown inclined to flush readily, and it was a moot point among the fair ones of his acquaintance whether his heavily-fringed eyes were black or darkest blue. The closest inspection of these lustrous orbs was required to determine that the last-mentioned hue was theirs; it is, however, simple justice to state that numerous ladies were competent to decide the matter.

These two utterly dissimilar characters had had exactly the same environment from earliest infancy. Thirty years before they are introduced to the reader, the Rev. Joseph Brooks, pastor of a poor little church in a poor little New England village, was, in common with his wife and the rest of the community, moved to exceeding wonderment by the unaccountable behavior of a man who was lodging at the only tavern in the place. This man wore garments of exaggerated shabbiness, although he had the best accommodations the house afforded, and spent money, according to the simple notions of the place, like a prince. His coarse red hair and beard, taken in conjunction with his pallid brown skin and sparkling black eyes, were obviously false, and the whole village agreed—for once—that the man was disguised, and that the disguise was a very poor one.

But if his appearance was singular, his conduct

was still more so. He had come to the tavern on a summer afternoon, driving a spirited young horse with one hand and holding in the other arm a crying child about a month old, which he carried into the sitting-room and loudly consigned to the tender mercies of any woman who would care for it. A nurse soon volunteering, the man paid her liberally in advance, and for some days gave himself no further concern about his infant charge. He told the crowd of loungers who witnessed his arrival that he was a widower, and that he meant to settle in the village if upon inspection he liked it. That such was really his intention was apparently borne out by the assiduity with which he questioned the inhabitants upon various points,—chiefly, it was discovered on comparing notes later, upon the character of the minister, Joseph Brooks.

But on the fourth evening of his visit he abruptly called for his bill, paid it, had the horse harnessed and the child wrapped up, and at ten o'clock drove off in the same direction whence he had come.

An hour later the Rev. Joseph Brooks and his wife were aroused from slumber by a tremendous pounding at their door. On descending, partly dressed and very much startled, they heard the sound of wheels rapidly retreating in the distance, and saw lying on the door-step the child of the mysterious stranger. Mrs. Brooks snatched it to her breast and soothed its crying, while her husband detached a paper from the child's dress and read it aloud by the light of a candle:

"I have been minded more than once to kill this

child. I do not know what stayed me, unless it was the hand of his dead mother.

"I have inquired about you, and learn that you are a man in a thousand for purity, for integrity, for zeal in good works. I intrust the child to you, with the one injunction to cultivate his moral faculties at the expense, if necessary, of all else.

"The enclosed amount of money will be sent you annually. It is yours to use as you please.

"Call him Jerome Harvey."

Mr. Brooks mechanically counted the roll of bills,—it contained rather more than his yearly salary. He saw himself and his overworked wife suddenly raised from bitter poverty to comparative affluence; he felt a keen delight at the tribute paid him,—the higher tribute since it came from a bad, unscrupulous man; and he said, solemnly,—

"Mary, this child is no less a trust from God than our own little Stephen. May we be strengthened for our great task!"

And when the infant was asleep in the crib beside Stephen, then a year old, they prayed together over the children, and talked throughout the long night of how they should best train their precious charges for earth and heaven, and into what beneficent channels they could turn the stream of wealth whose control was thus unexpectedly put into their hands. It never occurred to these simple souls that the money might not be sent; nor would such a fear have been justified by the facts, for regularly once a year arrived a check signed by a prominent firm of lawyers in New York for the

same generous sum that had been pinned to the baby's dress.

Mr. Brooks met all inquiries with the statement that little Jerome's mother was dead, that the child had been confided to himself, and that his "keep" was amply provided for,—of which latter clause the village poor soon had gratifying proof in the increased benefactions of their pastor.

Stephen and Jerome grew up together amid the wholesome surroundings of a New England rural community. They had before them daily the example of two persons of the rarest piety, in whom self was crucified, and for whom life meant only an opportunity of serving God and man. The two boys learned all that Mr. Brooks could teach them, and then completed their education at a college in a neighboring town, where was maintained the salutary if severe discipline which had governed their existence at home. They graduated in a blaze of glory, Jerome because he had carried off some very high honors, Stephen because the witty and eloquent prize oration was his.

The young men spent the summer weeks following Commencement at the homestead, and during these weeks Joseph and Mary Brooks recognized fully a fact which they had hitherto but dimly discerned,—namely, that in one case prayer and precept and training had failed of their effect. By the same universal law of rotation which makes the son of a drunkard a total abstainer and *his* son again a drunkard, Stephen had revolted against the ascetic rules by which he had been brought up, and was a

renegade from his father's faith and practice. It required all the fortitude engendered in the minister and his wife by life-long habits of patience and submission to support the anguish of this discovery.

Their adoptive son was, on the contrary, all that the fondest hopes could desire. His feeling about his unknown parents had never been either bitter or indifferent. From boyhood he had said to himself in frequent ruminations on the subject,—

"If they were worthy people, I must strive not to disgrace them; if they were not, then I am equally bound to rise above the source from which I spring."

This principle of conduct had led to the best results, and Mr. and Mrs. Brooks, while almost heart-broken over their own son's apostasy, were yet able to rejoice that the little bud of humanity flung at their door so many years since had blossomed to such noble manhood.

"Take care of Stephen, Jerome," said Stephen's mother, on the eve of the young men's departure for New York, where they had elected to enter the lists against fortune. "He is weak and unstable as water,—oh, that I should live to say it! Only your care can save him from being a mental and bodily wreck, as he is even now a spiritual one."

"I will be an elder brother—more than a brother—to him, as you have been more than a mother to me," promised Jerome, kissing her little plain old face.

And in the coming years he kept his word, though Stephen from sheer caution soon ceased to commit any but reasonably wild excesses. Jerome rarely

let twenty-four hours pass without seeing his foster-brother, and regularly four times a year he took him as it were by the scruff of the neck and haled him up to the little New England parsonage. One of these visits, made in the sixth year of their sojourn in New York, was prolonged beyond its usual limits by the illness and death of Joseph Brooks, and still further protracted by the immediately succeeding demise of his wife.

When his mother's funeral was over, Stephen thriftily proposed to sell the house.

"Sell your birthplace, your boyhood's home!" cried Jerome, in righteous wrath. "You shall never do it, Stephen Brooks!" he declared, taking possession of the title deeds in order that his vow could not be rendered nugatory. "Besides," he added, his indignation subsiding, "it will be a capital place to come to for a quiet honeymoon."

"Yours, perhaps," said Stephen. "Marrying is not in my line."

"It is certainly not in mine," said Jerome, gravely.

The resolution not to marry had indeed been coincident with his earliest realization of his position. It was enough for one to live in hourly fear of disagreeable disclosures. He would never ask a girl to share this unpleasant expectation, nor risk transmitting to his children all manner of ancestral vices. No, he would never marry until the mystery of his birth was cleared up. And this he began to fear would never be.

On his first visit to New York he had sought out the lawyers who annually sent the check for his

maintenance. They willingly told him the little they knew. Once a year they received by mail a sum of money. It was sent in an unregistered envelope in the most careless manner. The money was always wrapped in a slip of paper inscribed, "For Jerome Harvey, care of Rev. Joseph Brooks, Greenwood, Vermont." A separate bank-bill bore the firm-name and was appropriated by them in payment for their services. All the papers and envelopes had been preserved. No two of the latter bore the same post-mark, which was usually that of some foreign city. The addresses and inscriptions had been formed by cutting words from newspapers, the type-writer not yet being evolved from its inventor's brain.

Jerome looked over the bundle of papers attentively, then flung them down with a hopeless sigh.

"I shall never touch any more of the money," he said.

"My dear Mr. Harvey!" remonstrated the lawyer. "Be assured the money would not be sent you had you not some moral or legal right to it."

"I shall not use it," repeated Jerome.

"But there is no means of notifying the donor of your intention. The money will continue to be sent, and it seems to me your duty to prevent its lying idle, to use it for some charitable purpose."

After a few moments' reflection Jerome admitted the force of this observation, and directed that the money should be sent as formerly to his guardian. This was accordingly done until Mr. Brooks's death, since when Jerome had bestowed it on various insti-

tutions for the care of orphans and foundlings. The practice of his profession—stenography—brought him an ample support.

CHAPTER VI.

"'Twere little praise
Did full resources wait on our good will
At every turn."

ROBERT BROWNING.

ON the same sunny May day Bella Forrester had chosen for her exodus from Buffalo, Jerome Harvey was seated at his desk in his office. Stephen Brooks was also present. He usually wrote his articles in his friend's office, feeling that he conferred an honor upon Harvey by so doing; but on this occasion he was not at work. He was leaning out of the open window, smoking, and contemplating the rushing throng in the street below, his own idle mood in delicious contrast, as it seemed to him, to their eager hurry.

"Telegraph boy's just turned into our stairway," he announced, presently.

"You speak as if you were but yesterday from Greenwood, and a telegram was still a remarkable event," said Harvey.

And so in this case it proved to be. The boy came into the room and departed; Harvey tore open the envelope and read the message. He uttered no

exclamation, and it was not until some minutes later that Brooks, wearied at last by the sight of the activity in the street, turned from the window and observed the startling effect the telegram had produced. Harvey still sat motionless, gazing with wild eyes at the paper; his face was alarmingly pale.

"What's up, old fellow?" said Brooks, shaking him roughly but not unkindly by the shoulder. The touch served to rouse Harvey from his abstraction; the blood rushed into his face, and he sprang from his chair.

"Read, read!" he cried, flinging the telegram on his desk and beginning to pace the floor in great excitement.

Brooks took up the paper and read aloud:

"Miss Diana Forrester, of Suspension Bridge, Niagara Co., N. Y., can furnish you with the information you desire. Settle your affairs for a long absence and come at once."

"Well," commented Mr. Brooks, "I must say the person who sent this message—you see it's not signed—recklessly disregarded economy. A letter or a postal would have done just as well, and——"

"No, no!" exclaimed Jerome, sitting down at his desk and beginning to put his papers in order. "Don't you see? This Diana Forrester is probably my mother's sister, and perhaps she is dying. A letter would have lost twenty-four hours."

"Oh!" said Brooks, a light breaking in on him. "Then you think this telegram relates to your parentage?"

"Good heavens, yes! What other information do I care for?"

"I never thought you cared very much for that," said Brooks, much surprised at his friend's agitation.

"Then you were dull, blind, a mere sightless clod!" cried Harvey, impatiently. "Not a day has passed since I was a boy that I haven't longed for news of my family as the one chief good of life. You to call yourself a writer, forsooth! What can you invent or divine that will be of interest to humanity when you never guessed your bosom friend's one ambition? The minds of men are a sealed book to you. Stephen, old boy, I can't face this knowledge, good or bad, quite alone. Come with me, will you?"

"Of course," said Stephen, who would have been quite as willing to go to Florida or Nebraska. "Half hasn't been said about the Falls that might be. Perhaps I shall write a novel there."

"Perhaps you won't," returned Jerome, not ill-naturedly, but as if stating an accepted fact. "You know you will never have perseverance to write a novel. Go out, now, and get time-tables and our tickets."

Brooks, catching something of his friend's eagerness, went briskly out and executed these and other commissions, while Harvey wrote and despatched a number of letters. But with all their haste they were unable to take a train until the following morning, and it was in the evening of that day, as they were approaching their destination, that Harvey walked up and down the smoking-car and Brooks

compared him to a young Franciscan or Dominican monk,—whichever was most given to flagellations and fasting.

"I don't like to see you so worked up, Jerome," he said, as Harvey at last flung himself into the seat. "I wish you'd prepare yourself to meet the worst."

"Well, I don't know what you call the worst," said Harvey. "I've feared all manner of disgraceful things for thirty years; it can't be so bad to face only one of these contingencies."

"Perhaps the whole thing is a hoax," suggested Brooks.

"Who would be so cruel?" said Harvey, to whom this possibility had not occurred.

"Lots of people,—some of the Greenwood girls, for instance, who are angry because you won't marry them."

"Every one in Greenwood ought to perfectly understand my not marrying."

"They understand your feeling in the matter, and doubtless think it, as I do, equally morbid and absurd," rejoined Brooks. "But this feeling isn't so strong as you think it is, Jerome; if you once meet the right girl your objections to matrimony will vanish."

Jerome looked at his watch. "We shall arrive at ten,—not too late for a business call," he observed.

"What! would you rush into the presence of a dying woman—I believe you've quite settled that Miss Forrester is moribund—at that late hour? Impossible!" protested Brooks.

"A woman of feeling, dying or not, would gladly

put a relative out of painful suspense," affirmed Harvey.

Brooks laughed. "A relative, quotha! Why don't you call her your aunt and be done with it? It would be funny if Miss Diana Forrester should prove a fascinating young beauty, and no connection of yours at all. Though being only Miss, she cannot be *very* fascinating; that is reserved for the maritated and widowed women."

"I cannot conceive how a man remembering such a mother as yours," said Jerome, "can entertain such odious ideas about women."

"Mother was married, of course," said Stephen, penitently. "But she wasn't a bit fascinating, if that's what you want me to say."

Jerome did not utter the retort which rose to his lips, for at that instant the brakeman shouted "Suspension Bridge!" and the two young men left the train. They went to a hotel, and while they registered Harvey could not refrain from asking the clerk if he knew Miss Diana Forrester.

"Yes, sir; know her by sight."

"Is she"—it was on his tongue to say "dying," but he substituted "well" just in time.

"She was driving round town to-day."

"Thank you," said Harvey, immensely relieved. He agreed with Brooks that there was no pressing necessity for calling that night, but as early next morning as his friend considered permissible, he set off alone and on foot to seek the decisive interview.

He was admitted by the little maid-servant who performed the not very arduous labors of Miss For-

rester's establishment, and waited in the crimson and olive parlor while the mistress of the house scrutinized his card in her sitting-room up-stairs.

"Mr. Jerome Harvey! I don't know the name, Bella; I have no idea who he is."

"Go down and find out," advised Bella.

"Perhaps he asked for you; strangers never presume to intrude upon me in this way."

"You had better hurry,—he may be stealing the tiles out of the fireplace," said Bella. And somewhat alarmed for her treasures, Diana descended the stairs.

One glance at her visitor reassured her: this tall, grave gentleman was not a thief. But his dignity and gravity were not incompatible with the character of a book-agent, and on the supposition that such was his vocation Diana regarded him with coldly questioning eyes.

"Miss Forrester, I believe?" said Harvey.

A very slight inclination of the head was the reply.

"Permit me to apologize for disturbing you at so early an hour," he continued, a little disconcerted by the lady's frigidity.

Diana, still entertaining the book-agent theory, made no sign that pardon was accorded.

"As, however, I had every reason to believe that my call was expected, I ventured to select the earliest possible hour for making it."

"You are entirely mistaken," said Diana, with great decision. "Not only was your call unexpected, but I am quite at a loss what motive, unless

one of idle curiosity, impelled you to come here at all."

The young man flushed deeply. He was astounded; he had not thought that this slender young lady with the soft brown eyes could speak in such distinctly repellent tones.

"You will admit," he said, handing her the telegram, "that my coming from New York City in response to this summons implies a motive of greater force than idle curiosity."

Diana read the message; she thought it not improbable that he himself had written it an hour previously upon a blank procured at the office. Her mind reverted to its original fear of him,—perhaps even as she read the telegram he was examining the doors and windows with a view to a burglarious entrance.

"Even yet I do not see why you have sought this interview, nor why I should allow it to be prolonged," said Miss Forrester.

Harvey was in a rage. He felt that he would suffer anything rather than owe her any favors. But he was saved from uttering this feeling by a sudden sense of the ludicrous contrast between this calm young woman and the doting old aunt whom he had half expected to fall on his neck with tears and caresses. He smiled, and after an appreciable pause said, in as winning a manner as he could command,—

"I perceive, Miss Forrester, that you did not summon me here, and once more I ask pardon for this intrusion. But it is possible you can furnish me with a clue to the sender of that message. You will

understand my pertinacity when I tell you that I hope the information promised therein concerns my parentage, of which I am wholly ignorant."

Diana was so startled by these words that she dropped into a chair, though she still carefully refrained from asking her visitor to do so. She divined instantly who had sent the telegram. So here was another person whom Marcy Forrester had compelled to remain worse than orphaned all his life! She felt a faint stirring of sympathy, so faint, however, that she was able to repress it quickly. What! was she to make common cause with a stranger in this disgraceful quest?

"I know nothing about this despatch," she said, restoring it to the young man.

He looked at her searchingly, suspecting that she could have told him something, but he merely said,—

"I regret to have troubled you so much. I dare say I shall discover what I wish to know without your aid."

"I hope you will be successful," said Diana, with an approach to cordiality.

To which polite aspiration Jerome responded by a grave, unsmiling bow, and took his departure.

Returning to the hotel, he flung himself into a chair beside his friend and awaited the latter's queries.

"*Was she fascinating?*" Brooks asked, with breathless interest.

"She was young and not bad-looking; but she was the most intensely disagreeable woman I ever met."

"Well, there's a certain fascination in that," affirmed Brooks. "To make the cold eyes melt with tenderness, the sharp tongue utter soft endearments——"

"Oh, hold your tongue!" interrupted Harvey, impatiently. "She gave me no help; if she knows anything, she won't tell. Can't you suggest something?"

"If you simply intrust the matter to me there will be no difficulty about it," Brooks declared, and Harvey professing his entire willingness to do this, he proposed making investigation at the telegraph-office.

Their inquiries were met by an unqualified refusal to reveal anything about the despatch.

"You *must* know; this is a small town, and it was sent only three days ago, and you can't have forgotten," insisted Brooks.

"Anonymous telegrams are frequently sent, and are treated by the companies as inviolable secrets, the same as other social or business communications," explained the operator. "I should be dismissed from the service were I to give any information respecting such a message."

"Thus you see, Jerome," said Brooks, as they left the office, "one person may with impunity address another by telegraph in words of love, hatred, defiance, or contempt, as his passions may dictate, and then he may laugh the deep, dark, ominous ha! ha! of the villain, without fear of detection. Cheer up, old fellow! the case is by no means hopeless. What do you say to a drive as a means of banishing your despondency?"

"Anything you like," assented Harvey, and accordingly they spent the afternoon driving from one point of interest to another; but they had both visited the place many times, and neither regarded the scenery very appreciatively. Harvey in particular was so abstracted that his companion took refuge in conversation with the driver.

"Ye're right, they do," said the latter, in answer to a query as to whether the Falls did not bring many singular people to the vicinity. "This is the worst place in the world for cranks. There's suicides by the dozen, an' there's the men that want to jump off the bridges, an' them that wants to swim the Whirlpool Rapids like poor Webb. But the queerest crank that ever came here has stayed."

"Under the Falls, I suppose you mean?" said Brooks, jocularly.

"No, sir; he's livin' yet. He dresses like a Chineese half the time, an' he eats nothin' but Graham crackers an' water, an' he's that rich he fixes up his parlor every three months, throwin' all the old furniture over the river-bank."

"These are indeed the eccentricities of genius," observed Brooks. "What's his name?"

"Forrester,—Marcy Forrester."

The young men exchanged a glance of triumph. Why had they not thought of asking if there were any other persons of that name in town?

"Where does he live?" inquired Harvey.

"Down on the river-bank, first house beyond Miss Diana Forrester's."

"Drive straight there, then!"

"No," interposed Brooks, "drive back to the hotel. It's dinner-time now, Harvey, and I'll walk over to Marcy Forrester's with you in the gloaming."

CHAPTER VII.

"For we are all, like swimmers in the sea,
Poised on the top of a huge wave of Fate,
Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall;
And whether it will heave us up to land,
Or whether it will roll us out to sea,—
Back out to sea, to the deep waves of death,—
We know not, and no search will make us know;
Only the event will teach us in its hour."

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

"WELL, Uncle Marcy! What do you think of me? Do I look a thorough *grande dame*? Or do I disgrace my magnificent costume?"

Bella Forrester, descending the stairway of her uncle's house, asked these questions lightly and without any misgivings as to what the answer would be. The old gentleman was waiting for her at the foot of the stairs, and she laughed as she noted the rapid change of his expression from doubtful expectancy to proud delight. He took her hand and led her forward, scrutinizing her from head to foot, and uttering the most extravagant encomiums. They made a very quaint and striking picture darkly framed by the rich Oriental hangings of the square hall,—the old man, in his yellow satin and black

velvet court suit, his thin worn face lit up by an eager interest, and the young woman all smiles and blushes, as innocently pleased with her trained Watteau dress as a child wearing her mother's finery. Philippe and Celeste, in the background, could not restrain their admiration.

"Are you truly satisfied with me?" asked Bella.

"More—much more than satisfied, my dear," said Mr. Forrester, warmly. "I never in all my life saw a more charming woman than you are this minute. The only thing we have to regret is that my opinion cannot be endorsed by younger eyes and lips than my own."

"You know perfectly well, Uncle Marcy, that the compliments of a brainless, tasteless young man are not needed to re-enforce yours,—you who have seen the fair ladies of every court in Europe," said Bella. "But now shall we proceed to our reading?"

"Yes; you may go directly into the parlor. I will bring the books from the library and join you in a moment," said Mr. Forrester, and accordingly they went into the two opposite rooms. Just at this juncture the door-bell gave a peal that rang through the house with insistent reverberations.

So very rarely was Mr. Forrester's threshold crossed by a visitor that this intimation of the advent of one produced a decided sensation. Bella, coquettishly disporting herself before the mirrors which lined the parlor walls, smiled to think that after all some one besides Marcy Forrester would see her; that gentleman hastily put down the books he was gathering up, exclaiming, "So soon?" while

his face betrayed unmingled vexation; Celeste, in quite a flutter of surprise, hurried to perform the unaccustomed duty of opening the hall-door.

"Can I see Mr. Marcy Forrester?" asked Jerome Harvey.

"No, sorr; it is well known that Mr. Forrester niver sees any one widout an appointment."

"Oh, speak again, bright angel!" murmured Brooks, enraptured by the incongruity of her accent and her dress.

"I must see Mr. Forrester on business of the utmost importance," said Harvey, impatiently.

"Thin yez must go away an' write him a letther, an' if he wants to see yez he'll write whin yez can come," explained Celeste. She had imbibed enough of her master's spirit to enjoy the angry and disappointed expression on the young man's face.

But at that moment a voice called from the library, "The gentleman is expected, Celeste; you may show him in." And Celeste was forced to obey.

A difficulty, however, presented itself,—there were *two* gentlemen, the taller of whom she ushered into Mr. Forrester's presence; the other she hardly knew what to do with. After a moment she decided that she ought not to admit him into the parlor without Mrs. Forrester's permission, and, pushing forward one of the high hall-chairs of Spanish leather, said, "Plaze be sated, sorr!" and left him.

Marcy Forrester scanned closely the young man who advanced towards him, and in the first glance recognized two facts,—that he should never like

Jerome Harvey, and that he could not withhold from him a certain grudging respect and admiration.

"I believe, sir, you are the person who sent me this telegram?" said Harvey. He was so possessed by a sense of the critical importance of this interview that he chafed under the necessity of at least beginning it in a calm and decorous frame of mind.

The old man made no pretence of looking at the telegram. "Yes, I sent for you," he replied, still keenly observant of Harvey's tall, lithe figure and earnest face. "Take a chair. I trust you had no great trouble in finding me out?"

"Very little," said Harvey, seating himself. "Since you cared to mystify me at all, I wonder you did not make the process more complete."

"It was not worth while; when you arrive at my age you will find that very few things are worth while," said Mr. Forrester, jauntily. "Besides, do not you think thirty years a long enough mystification?"

Harvey, annoyed at this light reference to a matter so painful to himself, remained silent. Mr. Forrester presently resumed:

"Thirty years; yes, it is over thirty years since you were put in the keeping of the Rev. Joseph Brooks."

"You are, I conclude, the man who left me with Mr. Brooks?" said Harvey, in a tone whose tense anxiety only made Mr. Forrester more careless and jaunty.

"My dear young sir, you jump at conclusions very hastily," he remonstrated. "You have not the slightest warrant for such an assertion."

"Nevertheless, I repeat it," said Harvey. "And let me beg that now, after—as you say—thirty years' mystification, you will at last adopt a straightforward course and tell me all that it concerns me to know."

"A straightforward course," said Mr. Forrester, musingly. "I must have heard that phrase somewhere; it has a familiar ring; and yet it conveys no meaning to my mind."

"I can easily understand that," said Harvey, "since a straightforward course is evidently the one of all others you have never adopted."

"Exactly so," said Mr. Forrester. "I have always enjoyed cheating and hoodwinking persons less astute than myself; and when I cease to enjoy this diversion I shall be dead."

"I am, then, to infer that, not content with keeping me from my infancy in the most humiliating position conceivable, you intend to employ your talents in giving me still greater pain?" said Harvey. He longed to plant a blow in the smirking yellow face; only the fact that Marcy Forrester was old enough to be—and very possibly was—his father restrained him.

"Admirably put, Mr. Harvey! you have stated my intention to a nicety. But who knows that I may not tell the truth one of these days? Mind, I do not encourage the hope."

"You will; I know you will!" said Harvey. "Sir, you would not withhold the truth a single moment if you knew my anxiety. I long for the affection, the ties of blood, denied me all my life. And some one who should be dear to me—my

mother, perhaps—may be suffering for help that I might render!"

"You are very brave," said the old man. "Most men, situated as you are, would prefer to let their mother's history remain an unknown quantity."

Harvey might have resented this implication had he not just adopted the charitable supposition that his host was mad.

"Sir, I no longer entreat,—I demand that you shall tell me who I am," he said, at his gravest and sternest. "In case you refuse——"

"You will let loose the dogs of war?" said Mr. Forrester, smiling amiably. "The pleasant custom of extorting truth by the rack has, I believe, lately fallen into desuetude; nor do I now recall any court of law which would be likely to assume jurisdiction in the case."

He paused to laugh a little; it was a slow, luxurious laugh, like an epicure's dainty sipping of some rich wine; it seemed to imply that it was but the first of many laughs Mr. Forrester expected to enjoy at Mr. Harvey's expense. The latter gentleman wished he had brought his friend into the room with him: Brooks possessed powers of innuendo and insult which Harvey thought would be finely matched with this old man's.

"I am the only person on earth who knows your history," Mr. Forrester presently proceeded. "It would be perfectly useless for you to attempt to trace my actions of thirty years ago. I have never lived six months in any one place,—that is, till I was forced to come to this cursed hole,—nor have I often

in the course of my life made use of my own name. You perceive you will never learn the truth unless you learn it from me. And there is no reason whatever why I should divulge it without being well paid."

"You must know that I am a poor man," said Harvey.

"My dear sir, do not affront me by alluding to money! No; the price of the important disclosure you wish me to make is simply that you will visit me, will spend some weeks under my roof."

It was Harvey's turn to laugh, which he did very genuinely. "Your terms are exorbitant," he returned.

"Not so," said Mr. Forrester, almost eagerly. "The house is comfortable, the surroundings picturesque. As for society, you will have, besides my own, that of two young women. You need not say that ladies' society has little attraction for you,—it is perfectly obvious to me. But one of these young women is simply charming, and to know her will be quite a liberal education for you."

"I have a friend here with me," remarked Harvey. To his surprise he found himself actually considering the proposal.

"Is your friend—ahem!—at all like yourself?" inquired Mr. Forrester, apprehensively.

"No," said Harvey, smiling; "he is as different from me as possible."

"Then bring him with you by all means. I am sure he must be a delightful person," said the old man, cordially.

"I will think over the matter," said Harvey, rising to go, "and will let you know my decision in the morning. But it seems so absurd. Are you quite sure you will not speak upon any other condition?"

"Absolutely sure," said Mr. Forrester; and though his sarcastic smile remained unchanged, there came into his face a certain expression of inflexibility which Harvey was not slow to observe.

The young man paused at the door and looked back. He felt only a grave, sad pity for this poor old man in his bedizened costume, uttering his unlovely gibes and taunts. But this of course he could not speak, and he only said, as he was about to open the door,—

"May I ask you, sir, why you chose to send me to Miss Diana Forrester? You knew she was quite unable to help me."

"Do you not see? I did it merely for the purpose of annoying her."

"You must have been rather hard up for amusement," Harvey commented.

"I regarded my action not as amusement, but as a duty," the old gentleman explained. "When you are better acquainted with Miss Forrester you will see that it is every one's imperative, sacred duty to torment her to the fullest extent of his power."

"Oh! Well, I wish you a good-night," said Harvey. He went into the hall, where he found Brooks awaiting him, and they left the house together.

But Mr. Stephen Brooks had not spent the interval during which this conversation took place in the

hall. He did, indeed, pass a few moments after his friend left him in inspecting the curious hangings and furniture of that apartment; then he resolved to explore the premises further, the consideration that he had no shadow of right to do so being, as usual with him, entirely inoperative.

Not wishing to follow either Harvey or Celeste, he refrained from opening the doors through which these persons had vanished; a third door he determined to enter. But with his hand upon the handle of the door he paused, arrested by a sudden strange premonition such as poor Fatima ought to have felt on the threshold of Blue Beard's fatal closet. He knew for one instant that it would be better for him if he never opened that door; the next instant he boldly turned the handle and entered the parlor.

He saw a spacious room, brightly yet softly lighted by many wax tapers in crystal candelabra and delicate brass sconces; a large chandelier, all a-glitter with quivering prisms, hung from the ceiling, which was painted to represent a pale-blue sky half veiled with pearly clouds. The walls were draped with azure silk, which the weaver's art had thickly strewn with white, pink, and creamy roses. The curtains were of pink silk; the furniture, of an ivory whiteness arabesqued in gold, was upholstered with the same rosy silk. There was not a dark color or a straight line in the room; beauty, luxury alone had been consulted in its decoration. It was a holiday room, and Mr. Brooks's first thought was that his nineteenth-century business-suit was oddly out of place in it.

His second thought was that the lady who turned away from the mirror on his entrance was more than worthy of her environment. The ample train sweeping back from her graceful figure was of faint-green satin; yellow lace draped the front of the gown, caught here and there with pearl beads. From the low square-cut corsage her neck, encircled with strands of small pearls, rose pure and white; her hair was snowily powdered. The effect of the white and faintly-green costume was deliciously fresh and cool.

Mr. Brooks regarded this charming apparition a moment in silence, closing the door behind him as if unconscious of his action. Then he said,—

“I fear I intrude.”

“Not at all,” said Bella, with calm politeness. “This is the reception-room; the servant was quite right to usher you in here. But should you not have gone into the library? For I think—I may be wrong—but I think you are Mr. Jerome Harvey, of whom I heard a little this morning. Are you not?”

“Good heavens, no! I would rather be shot than be Jerome Harvey!” cried Mr. Brooks, startled into candor. “But permit me to make an inference in return,—I fancy you are Miss Diana Forrester.”

Bella shook her head, smiling. Loyalty to her friend and hostess prevented her saying that she would rather be shot than exchange her identity for that estimable young woman’s; but she raised her eyes to the prism-hung chandelier with an expression of devout gratitude as she replied,—

“You too are mistaken. Still, since you are not

Mr. Harvey, and I am not Miss Forrester, I suppose we ought to feel perfectly well acquainted?"

The young man smiled as if he fully appreciated the force of this occult reasoning. "I am only too willing," he said, and a little silence succeeded.

Neither of these persons, ordinarily so fluent of speech, knew exactly what to say to the other. Stephen Brooks was in a manner overwhelmed by the unexpectedness and strangeness of this meeting. Bella felt that her masquerade, however pretty, was scarcely dignified, and she was more annoyed than pleased by the admiration in the stranger's eyes,—were his eyes black or dark, dark blue?

"But of course it is only my dress," she reassured herself.

Presently Mr. Brooks ventured to remark, "When I came into the room I fancied for a moment that I was dreaming. It seemed impossible the Parisian *salon* of a hundred years ago could be so perfectly reproduced."

"The illusion was of course dispelled the instant your glance rested on me," said Bella, with her sweet smile.

"No; when I saw you I imagined, I hoped that you were some gay marquise come back from the eternal shades for a brief bright hour, rather than a living woman."

"You *hoped* so?" said Bella. "And pray why?"

He hesitated. Then,—*"Some day I will tell you,"* he said, quietly.

An angry flush swept over Bella's face. This utter stranger to talk of "some day!" She did not

rebuke his presumption in words, but she looked at him so steadily, so haughtily, that his eyes quailed. He did not dare speak again, and it was several minutes before she chose to reopen conversation on an impersonal topic.

They talked of the weather and the river until Brooks heard Harvey's voice in the hall. He rose at once.

"My friend is going," he said. "Allow me to regret that I must go too. Good-evening."

Bella bowed coldly, and he left the room. She was still a little offended, but she soon forgot her resentment in thinking how agreeable it would be to relate this piquant adventure to Jack and Diana. Diana would scold, but not Jack.

As the young men walked back to the hotel, Harvey laid Marcy Forrester's invitation before Brooks. The latter advised acceptance thereof, concluding his argument in its favor in these words:

"And, as he says, the place is comfortable. You saw that I took a peep at the parlor. I opened the eyes of astonishment when I saw it, I assure you. It's a perfect gem."

"No one in the room?" asked Harvey.

"No one," said Brooks.

It is only the tyro in tender affairs who boasts of every word and glance he exchanges with a pretty woman; the man of experience maintains at all hazards a discreet silence on the subject.

CHAPTER VIII.

This awful waste of waters wild and white,
The liquid pearly spray dashed high in air,
The turquoise depths, the wooded rocky height,
To every soul a several message bear.
To many a one the torrent's endless surge
Shall seem the cruel voice of dark despair,
To some a battle-cry, to some a dirge,
While some a wedding-song shall hearken there.
Some in that grand eternal thunder tone
Shall hear an angel trumpet "God is great!"
Some mark the echo of pain's helpless moan,
Or list the sob of grief, the doom of fate.
To me, the water's mad and hurrying press
An image seems of strange confused distress.

WHEN the young men had for two weeks partaken of Mr. Marcy Forrester's hospitality, they freely confessed to each other that the time had passed in an extremely agreeable manner. Harvey felt an unwonted peace in the thought that in a few weeks at farthest he should receive the key to his life-long puzzle, and for the first time he ceased to fear that the revelations would be humiliating. As for Brooks, he had the faculty of enjoying himself in any circumstances; he browsed upon Mr. Forrester's bookshelves, or listened to that gentleman's acute observations, or accompanied his friend to call upon Mrs. and Miss Forrester, with apparently equal pleasure.

For already these four persons were on terms, if not of intimacy, at least of great kindliness. There

had been gay little dinners at Marcy Forrester's house, to which Diana had responded with a high tea; there had been whist and euchre parties; there had been plans made for strolls and drives throughout the supremely picturesque vicinity.

The first of these plans was carried into effect on a lovely day in mid-June. Mr. Forrester, to whom a walk around Goat Island was an impossible feat, declined to be of the party, but placed his carriage at their disposal. Philippe was happy, it being only when driving or going upon errands that he was permitted to assume modern American habiliments.

Diana had at first shrunk from the appearance of evil involved in passing the whole afternoon with two young men. "But surely," Bella had argued, "you are old enough to protect me, and I'm married enough to protect you." And in consequence of this or some other consideration, Diana put aside her scruples.

They left the carriage in the village and set out on foot to visit Goat Island. It was the first time they had all walked in company, yet it was seemingly by the volition of no one in particular that Mr. Harvey and Miss Forrester, Mr. Brooks and Mrs. Forrester, paired off together.

They went first into Prospect Park, a beautifully-kept enclosure with noble trees and smooth green turf, situated just at the brink of the Falls. After the river sweeps over the precipice it turns at a right angle, so that the water is almost on a level with the land on one side of Prospect Park, while on the adjacent side it is one hundred and sixty-five feet

below. The torrent dashes by with its old sleepless force, dissolving as it falls into feathery lightness; the spray, like melted pearl, is wafted up in immense clouds. From the foot of the Falls great soft masses of creamy foam float away, looking from above like tiniest flecks on the turquoise water, "where like a shoaling sea the lovely blue plays into green." Immense black rocks rise like angry sea-monsters out of the white waves that forever lash their dripping sides. Across the river the Canadian bank lies in shadow, and there are soft purple glooms between the dark pine-trees.

The four advanced to the broad stone parapet which secures immunity from danger of falling, and gazed down into the abyss.

"Do you know," said Mr. Brooks, raising his voice in order to be heard above the roar of the cataract, "I've observed a peculiarity about this spot: one always thinks exactly the same thing he thought the previous time he was here."

"Yes, I've noticed that, too," said Bella. "I've never looked over this parapet without feeling more strongly than at any other time in my life my own insignificance. I see that I am even a smaller speck in the scheme of creation than I fancied."

"And I," said Harvey, "always recall those words: 'Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up.'"

"I," said Diana, "invariably wonder why men do not find some means of economizing this tremendous force."

"Well," said Brooks, "for my part I have never

stood in this spot without asking myself if ever any one on earth suffered such torture as poor Avery must have done, clinging to that old stump out there on the verge of the Fall. He knew that daring, ingenuity, money, were all employed in his behalf; again and again he must have thrilled with hope in some new expedient, only to shudder with despair at each fresh failure. Great heavens! it's inconceivable,—the horror of living eighteen hours suspended over that seething hell of waters, his life, his young bride, his place on the happy earth forever lost to him; nothing before him but that awful death and the dark, dark future beyond. And yet all his misery was as nothing to that single instant when he felt his helpless hands relax and was torn away from his refuge with a scream which thousands of people echoed, and which none of them ever forgot!"

"Do not speak, do not think of those things," said Bella, after a pause. "If one is in the mood for it, Niagara Falls seems only one great grave. What point along these banks has not been the scene of some suicide or fatal accident?"

"That's one of the chief charms of the place," declared Mr. Brooks, as they turned away and began to walk slowly along the bank towards the Goat Island bridge. "A great many people actually come here because it feeds their vanity. Accidents? *They* are not going to slip or stumble near the brink, nor step backwards off a bridge. Suicide? They haven't embezzled money, their health is good, their nerves unshattered. These worthies will tell you that all the tragedies which darken the records of Niagara

might have been avoided by the exercise of common sense such as they possess."

"There may be something in what you say," admitted Bella. "I myself have always a sense of my own sagacity when I am here. Death is so near, around me on every hand, and yet I escape it!"

"That's exactly my idea!" said Mr. Brooks. He was delighted with this ready appreciation, and proceeded with his accustomed fluency to explain various other workings of the tourist's mind.

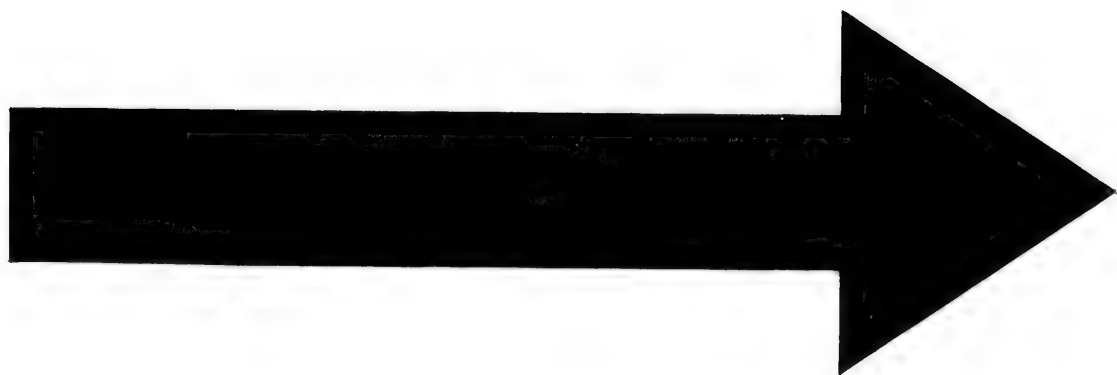
"I think the Falls are spoiled for any one who lives as near as Buffalo," remarked Bella, "by the necessity of taking all one's visitors here for a day. I average about six in a summer. They never say what they ought to; I never heard a striking or original observation from any person on his first sight of the Falls."

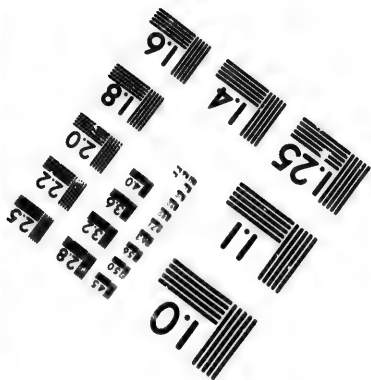
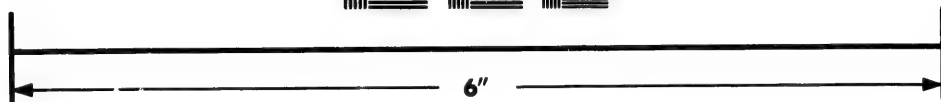
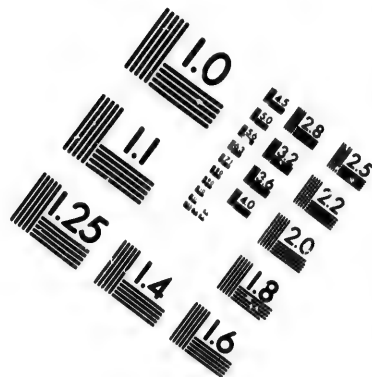
"Naturally; it takes time to develop the full impressiveness of the scene," affirmed Harvey, who with Diana formed the van of the little procession. "Doubtless your friends were grateful enough to you after they got home."

"I don't know," demurred Bella, her mind evidently dwelling on past wrongs. "Now this very Goat Island bridge," she said, as they stepped upon it; "people from the country always, *always* want to stand here and throw things in!"

"The rural mind has not a monopoly of that desire," said Harvey, with his frank smile, "for I picked this up for that very purpose." And he flung a shingle into the racing water.

They watched it whirled away in wide curves, now





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tossed quite out of the water, now submerged, now leaping forward, just as many a hopeless wretch has been hurried on to destruction. When the shingle was out of sight they crossed the bridge and were on Goat Island.

Through the sense of true beauty and fitness in the family who so long owned Goat Island, it has never been cleared into a grove or park, but yet retains the sylvan character it possessed hundreds of years ago. Great elm and oak trees tower overhead, their branches lovingly intertwined; here and there the silver shaft of a birch gleams white against the greenery. Cedar and hemlock fling out their fresh cool odor upon the air at every step; indeed, so inseparable is this odor from associations with the spot that a lover of the Falls never fails to be reminded of Goat Island by the scent of a sprig of hemlock. Beneath the trees grows an undisturbed tangle of vines and bushes; wild-flowers are as plentiful as they were when the place was an untrodden solitude; soft, thick moss covers the gnarled roots of trees and richly borders the pathway.

"This wood probably witnessed numerous love-scenes two centuries ago," said Mr. Brooks, sentimentally. "Doubtless many an Indian youth

'Laid his crystal bow aside,
And his silver shining quiver,'

to stroll with some dusky maid adown this path. Here they vowed their simple faith——"

"You are mistaken," interrupted Diana's cold, calm tones. "There was not this nice, pretty path

then; the whole island was covered with an impenetrable undergrowth. Besides, the bridge itself is of comparatively recent date, and your young people could not have flown here."

Mr. Brooks did not appear at all grateful for this information. "I believe the Indians sometimes rowed from the Canada shore over to the foot of the island, and climbed up the rocks. My lovers may have done the same," he returned, gayly enough; but it was noticeable that he thenceforward slackened his steps and gave other evidences of a distaste for Miss Forrester's society.

There existed between him and Bella a certain charming freemasonry happily not infrequent among widely-read people. One had only to make an allusion to any subject to find the other perfectly conversant with it. They knew the song or story of all the forests in romance, and as they rambled on through the wood they peopled it with the shadowy shapes of Merlin and Rosalind, of Robin Hood and Oberon, of Dian and Adonis.

They found this manner of conversation very pleasant, and refrained from overtaking their companions until they reached the little platform at the brink of the Fall. Here three of the party joined in inveighing against the initials rudely cut with pocket-knives which deface almost every inch of the railings and benches, and in declaring that these inscriptions could only be made by persons equally ignorant of the value of time and unable to appreciate the beauties of Nature about them. But Jerome Harvey dissented from this sweeping statement.

"I remember seeing one inscription on this railing that was not cut idly or thoughtlessly," he said. "It was in May, 1877. It had been carved only a few days before I saw it, for the letters were perfectly fresh; they were also skilfully formed. The words were, '*Ida is with God.*' Of course I shall never know whether Ida was sweetheart, wife, or daughter. The very mystery of it impressed me."

"It was a touching impulse, to leave that simple memorial to a loved one amid this everlasting grandeur," said Bella.

They walked on, pausing every now and then to look across or into the chasm from different points of view. Once Mr. Brooks took a few perilous steps down the bank, to cut two willow switches for the ladies. Bella accepted one, and thanked him sweetly for it, but Diana declined hers, on the ground that it was against the rules to mutilate the shrubbery.

One feels the sublimity of the Horseshoe Fall more keenly than that of the American. It is less approachable, less comprehensible; no island divides its centre, so that one can stand as it were in the very heart of it; no brave little steamer dares to draw near its foot, nor venture into that vast circular basin whose unsearchable depths imagination cannot picture nor plummet sound. There is no effect of veil-like lightness in the falling water here; a deep unbroken mass of lucent green, it sweeps over the majestic curve with a weight which seems as if it would crush the very rocks to powder. A rainbow answers the summons of the sun and rises

from the drifting spray, the one tender, evanescent thing amid the awful unchanging magnificence.

They gazed a long time upon this scene, then slowly sauntered on, and presently crossed the three bridges that connect the picturesque Sister Islands. When they reached the third of these little islands, Bella sat down upon a bench, saying she was tired; she took off her large brown straw hat, and the breeze from the rushing water fanned her rosy cheeks and lifted the light curls on her forehead. Fatigue being one of the weaknesses to which Diana, fragile though she looked, was nobly superior, she did not care to linger long, but returned with Harvey to Goat Island.

Bella and Stephen, thus left alone, were silent a little space. They had not chosen a very lovely spot for their few moments' repose. The Third Sister Island is but little more than a mass of gray stone, and very scant vegetation has taken root there. The water a few rods up-stream is so much above the level of the island that it seems every moment as if in its headlong descent it would engulf the whole place and tear it away from its foundations.

"A river is beyond all question the most beautiful body of water," Stephen presently remarked. "What is a brook, with its idiotic chatter? A pond stagnates; a lake, the ocean, get all and give nothing. But a river's calm progress blesses and purifies every mile it traverses."

Bella not challenging these assertions, the young man went on :

"And a river is a perfect simile of human life,—*any* river, but Niagara especially. The first few miles are like the peace of childhood; the rapids represent the one great experience of a life, whether passion, crime, or noble endeavor; the cataract is the crisis of that experience; the lower reach of the river is the succeeding existence, for a while tumultuous with regret or despair, but soon subsiding into the quiet of middle life, then sinking into the dull monotony of old age. And as the river ends in Lake Ontario, so life ends in death."

"It is easy to pick flaws in your metaphor," said Bella, smiling, "the most obvious being that every life has more than one such exciting experience as you describe."

"Yes," said Stephen; "but there is always one season supreme above all others, one period when we recognize that we enjoy, suffer, achieve, more than we have ever done or can ever do again. In that season we are in the rapids of our lives."

Bella mused a moment. The time when she had keenly enjoyed and sharply suffered seemed very far behind her. Presently she said,—

"Then I must have passed through the rapids long ago, I think."

"Not so," said Stephen, not altogether lightly. "You are, I should judge, twenty-six or seven years old; do you suppose you have yet lived your life out? There are, if I recollect aright, one or two shoals in Niagara River, up at Buffalo and Fort Erie, where the water glides along in shallow ripples; you may have known some trivial experiences corre-

sponding to them; but I do not believe you have gone through the rapids."

Bella gazed up at him, reflecting that he did not look much of an oracle in his blue summer suit, with his straw hat pushed back from his dark and somewhat heavy face. Her perception of his impertinence was dominated by an irresistible misgiving.

"There is no doubt in my mind, I repeat," he continued, gravely, "that you, Mrs. Forrester, will some time know an intensity of life surpassing anything you can dream of now. And—who can tell?—it may be this very summer, perhaps."

This time the impertinence was not to be ignored, and the lady resented it by rising and flinging the little willow switch as far from her as she could. It fell just short of the hurrying water, and lodged on a dripping, wave-worn rock.

"I meant to keep it as a souvenir," she said. "But I will keep nothing that can remind me of your words." Even as she spoke she knew she could never forget them.

Without replying, the young man stepped cautiously over one or two intervening stones and recovered the switch.

"Twice I have run some risk in getting this for you," he said, extending it towards her. The risk in either case had been trifling, but Mr. Brooks was not a man to underrate his own exploits. "I am sorry I offended you," he said, contritely. "Won't you accept this as a peace-offering?"

She hesitated. Both of them felt dimly that a

great deal depended upon her action. At last she took the switch.

"I forgive you freely," she said, with a laugh. They were very merry as they crossed Goat Island by the short cut through the woods. They rejoined the others at the point where Philippe was waiting with the carriage, and all through the homeward drive Bella continued in the gayest humor.

But she herself more than once felt her eyes grow hot with tears.—

"Tears for the unknown years
And a sorrow that was to be."

CHAPTER IX.

"Few words they said; the balmy odorous wind
Wandered about, some resting-place to find;
The young leaves rustled 'neath its gentle breath,
And here and there some blossom burst his sheath,
Adding unnoticed fragrance to the night;
But as they pondered, a new golden light
Streamed over the green garden."

MORRIS.

FOUR is an impossible number for conversation; even with three the opportunity to speak recurs too seldom; the ideal interchange of thought is in the form of a dialogue. Therefore, though Mrs. and Miss Forrester had at first received together the daily visits of the young men, it grew to be more

and more often the case that one pair communed together in the house, while the other sought the garden or veranda.

One afternoon in the latter part of June Miss Forrester was seated in her little parlor. She wore a simple gray dress, exquisitely fitting, and relieved at throat and wrists by a narrow line of linen scarcely whiter than her slender neck and little frail hands, which latter were veiled by a frost-like fabric, for she was engaged in crocheting lace. Her companion, Mr. Jerome Harvey, informed her that such labor was worse than useless, and explained fully how the lace could be made cheaper, stronger, and prettier, by machinery; but she continued to weave her shining needle in and out as if he had not spoken.

The room was deliciously cool and quiet. Through the open windows the mildest of zephyrs floated, lightly freighted with the fresh odors of the yet young foliage and flowers. Three or four great pink roses—not the products of Diana's garden, but procured by Mr. Harvey at some trouble and expense—stood in a tall crystal vase, their tender bloom outlined against an olive curtain.

There are in every one's acquaintance certain women with whom one never associates the idea of lovers, and whose engagement or marriage strikes one almost as a miracle might. They are usually of irreproachable goodness, endowed with placid tempers, and not destitute of beauty; but they lack the charm only less potent than beauty to attract a man, and a thousand times stronger to retain his

affection,—animation. Abroad, among gentlemen of leisure, a girl or even a matron may be silent if she chooses; but in America the men toil all day long, and it were selfish to expect them to assume during the holiday hours the added labor of entertaining. A woman must be prepared not merely to follow, but to lead conversation. Possessing this accomplishment, no woman ever remained unsought; lacking it, it is almost a foregone conclusion that no man will ever entreat so dull and lifeless a creature to hang the dead weight of her society upon his hands till death do them part.

Diana Forrester was one of these women. She was not a fool, but she very rarely offered any verbal proof to the contrary. On this occasion, however, she made an unusual effort to sustain her part in the conversation.

"It seems a long time," observed Harvey, "since I first entered this room, everything is so changed."

"Not everything," returned Diana: "I am not changed."

"True," said Harvey. She was less discourteous than at their first interview; but she was as cold, impenetrable, as much a stranger as then.

"Since my childhood I have changed in nothing but physical size," declared Diana. "I formed decided opinions on all subjects very early, and have never been tempted to alter them."

"Surely you do not think that anything to be proud of," said Jerome. "Such a state of mind precludes all development, all improvement."

"I do not defend this idiosyncrasy, any more than

"I defend the color of my hair," said Diana. "One belongs to me as much as the other."

Jerome was silent a moment, aghast at this glimpse of a dark and stolid mental condition. "But perhaps," he remarked, hopefully, "all these opinions you formed in your childhood were so invariably wise that no one could wish them changed."

"Perhaps so," said Diana. "I have no objection to airing one or two of my unchangeable sentiments, and you can judge whether they are right ones. The first thing I can remember making up my mind about is the character of Mr. Marcy Forrester. He came to see me, when I was about four years old, at the school where he had me educated. He wished to kiss me, but I refused, crying out, 'You are a bad man! I hate you! God hates you!' And from that day to this nothing has modified the feeling."

"You are severe," said Jerome, willing to make allowances for his putative father.

"I do think him a bad man, and I do hate him," said Diana, with conviction. "Ask him, he will confess that he never had a noble, unselfish impulse in his life."

"He says he has helped John Forrester in his business," ventured Jerome.

"Yes; and do you know why? Because he likes John's wife, Bella. She is gay and sprightly, and brightens life for him as I cannot do, and would not if I could. He is as selfish in that as in everything else."

Jerome, deeming it improper, in the uncertainty

of his relations with Marcy Forrester, to discuss that gentleman's character, requested the young lady to mention some other fixed decree of her mind.

"Well," she said, "I shall never marry. I decided upon that when I was ten years old."

"Isn't that resolution the common property of all young girls?" asked Jerome, smiling. "And does it not quickly falter when the Fairy Prince comes to combat it?"

"It's impossible for me to imagine any manner of Fairy Prince who could shake my determination," said Diana.

"I, too, made such a resolution many years ago," said Jerome, "and it is only of late I have thought it even possible to relinquish it." This speech seemed to him most important.

But Diana heard him quite unmoved. "It was not without giving much time and thought to the subject that I came to a decision," she said. "If I did not adhere to it I should feel that all that time and thought had been wasted."

Some one says that "talking of love is making love," and discourse on this theme between a young man and woman is usually fraught with a pleasant consciousness. Jerome was aware of this consciousness; but there was no trace of dubiety or embarrassment in Diana's manner.

"Do you think," the young man asked, rather gravely, "that when the Prince comes you will not care for him, or, caring, you can still resist him?"

"Oh, I am not one to borrow trouble," said Diana, "and so I have never speculated upon those ques-

tions. But let us say no more on this disagreeable topic. Don't you want to see my herbarium?"

Meanwhile, another conversation was in progress at the foot of the garden. Mrs. Forrester and Mr. Brooks sat in low rustic chairs in the shade of the pines, through whose branches a light fragrant breeze rose up from the river so far below. Bella wore a dress of creamy wool, her sole ornament a string of clouded amber beads close around her throat. She wore this necklace in season and out of season, alleging it to be most efficacious in warding off bronchial affections; she would, however, probably have resorted to some other preventive had the pure pale yellow been less eminently becoming. Any lack of color in her dress was fully supplied by the warm white and pink of her complexion and the varying brown and auburn shades of her hair.

"And so you are a writer!" she said, with interest. "Did you say an author, or only a writer?"

"Only a writer," the young man replied. "My friend says I have not insight or energy enough to be a novelist."

"I have sometimes thought you would be justified in resenting Mr. Harvey's manner to you," remarked Bella.

"Oh, Jerome is better than I, and of course he knows it, and it makes him a little arrogant. It's the arrogance of conscious virtue," explained Stephen, amiably. "Anyway, book-writing is very slow compared to journalism. There's nothing pleasanter than to be able to say a short, sharp word upon any question of the hour. And if any man offends one,

it's the easiest thing in the world to hold him up to the laughter or the scorn of a whole city with some epigram that shall sting like a blow."

"But the exercise of such a power must react, and hurt the man who wields it more than his intended victim," said Bella, her gray-blue eyes very serious.

"It *is* rather like hitting a cripple, I admit," said Stephen, "and I'm always ashamed of it afterwards. But all human effort, however beneficial to mankind, has a deteriorating effect upon the individual who makes it. A physician, whose duty it is to alleviate suffering, is soon hardened to the sight of it, without pity, without sympathy. A minister, always preaching to sinners, finally comes to believe in his own marvellous superiority, and in consequence is a detestable prig. A teacher, ever in contact with inferior minds, forgets the necessity of cultivating his own, and becomes a mere machine!"

"How much better, then, to make no more exertion than an oyster!" was Bella's grave reply to these astounding propositions. "Your writing, Mr. Brooks, of course brings you any amount of delightful attention?"

"Well, no," confessed Stephen. "You see, it's only intelligent people—always a small class—who know what is doing in literature. If the greatest author alive were to walk down Broadway not half as many heads would turn to look at him as at a pedestrian or a slugger."

"That's discouraging," said Bella. "But couldn't you be—well, a sort of literary slugger?"

Stephen laughed. "I'll think of it," he said.

"The best thing about literature as a profession is this: everything is grist to the mill. As Autolycus says, 'Every church, every lane, yields an honest man work.' Some trifling experience may lie hidden in a man's mind for years, and at last prove to be the kernel of his greatest romance. Now, this morning I wrote up our walk of the other day, and it's not half bad."

"And did you all the time intend to do that? Did you listen to every speech and weigh its market value? Have you held Miss Forrester and myself up to the laughter or the scorn of a whole city?" demanded Bella, looking as darkly suspicious as she could.

"No, no! There is not a word about you in it," said the young man. "Here is the manuscript; I am going to mail it before I go back to Mr. Forrester's."

Whereupon Bella very naturally implored him to read it, and, nothing loath, he proceeded to do so.

"IN ARTICULO MORTIS."

"Niagara Falls!"

I start as if I had been shot when the brakeman shouts these two words in at the door of the car. What special significance have they for me? I have heard them unmoved a thousand times. It must be that I was dozing in my seat when he spoke,—yes, that was it, for you know I have not been able to get much sleep lately.

Let me find out what time the train starts for

home. I must be particular about this,—very particular. Mary might be anxious if I missed it.

I stroll slowly down the street, stopping once to buy a cigar, and again to look at some fancy articles for Mary. But it is early in the day to cumber my hands with parcels, and I tell the shop-girl I will make a purchase when I come back this way later in the afternoon.

"I shall be sure to come back this way," I promise her, smiling.

Once more I pause, this time to drink from the fountain in Prospect Park. The water is rather warm, and I mentally resolve not to drink again till I can pour some of the sparkling, icy water out of the silver pitcher in my own dining-room at home.

Strange, isn't it, that I should delay and trifle so? For weeks I have had an irresistible desire to make this little trip,—an ordinary little pleasure trip, you know, such as I make a dozen times in a summer,—and yet now that I am here I cannot—shall I say dare not?—proceed directly to the great fall itself. At last, with a violent effort of will, I force my steps to the platform which overlooks the abyss.

People are leaning upon the stone parapet, laughing and chatting. It makes me angry to see such foolhardy carelessness. What a horrible thing it would be to fall over—accidentally!

Never has the place looked so grand to me as to-day. How beautiful the spray is,—half pearl, half diamond-dust! From its midst a magnificent rainbow rises. I bend over the parapet and gaze down at the turquoise water nearly two hundred feet

below ; its foam-flecked surface appears very still, as if it were quiet and exhausted after its tremendous plunge.

Men, thus gazing down, have been tempted to leap over, to essay for a few seconds the sensations of a bird in swift wild rush through the cool air. But the rocks rearing their black and jagged heads from the water below——

I shrink back, trembling and dizzy. Two or three girls smile at my evident cowardice.

I wander aimlessly away. Perhaps I had better go back to the dépôt and wait there till train-time. What! and not see Goat Island? That would be silly indeed. Of course I will go over there.

Once I pass a defective place in the sidewalk, and very cautiously I make my way over it. I should not like a broken leg or a sprained ankle.

Queer, isn't it, that a quiet business-man like me should have such a freak as this! The idea of my coming here all alone without Mary or the children!

But oddly enough, I must get over the idea that one of the children *is* with me,—little Kay, of whom I have hardly thought once a month these many years. To-day it seems as if he were running along beside me as he used to do, with his little straw hat and white embroidered dress, and the yellow hair curling about his bright baby face. Twenty years ago we laid him in his coffin, pale and still. Mary has never got over it altogether.

I stand a long time on Goat Island bridge. It's a wonderful piece of engineering. There were difficulties in the way of its construction which required

almost superhuman ingenuity to surmount. I admire the man, whoever he was, whose brains and energy made the bridge possible.

I have not achieved any great thing like that. At middle age my chief claim to distinction is that I possess the most remarkable head on record,—a head that never for a moment stops aching.

After one looks at the rapids awhile they remind one of the German water-nixies; mysterious creatures seem to be tossing wild white arms out of the water in strenuous endeavor to snatch me into their fatal embrace. I shudder at the fancy and walk forward to the island.

On either side of the path moss and ferns are growing. Overhead the branches greenly interlace. There is a delicious balsamic odor of fir and cedar in the air. Here perhaps Indian lovers strayed long ago. It would be rather pleasant to be an Indian, I think,—no letters, no figures, no insomnia.

It strikes me as very curious that the persons I meet do not notice me, do not look at me as if I were in any way a marked man. Well, why should they? I cannot for the life of me mention any reason why they should.

Again and again recurs the fancy that little Ray is dancing along beside me. When I reach home to-night I must have Mary get the curl she cut from his head as he lay dead. I want to see if I have kept the color right in my memory all these years.

Why can one never look upon the superb curve of the Horseshoe Fall without remembering that

bodies swept over it are seldom recovered? How many things that once were men lie pressed into those dark rocky caverns by the enormous weight of water, buried more surely than in any grave! A grewsome thought! There is a taint of death about the place.

Again I pass on, cross quickly the little fairy bridges, apparently so slight, in reality so strong, and find myself upon the Third Sister Island. It is only a mass of rocks, and the rapids above it are so terrific it seems every instant as if the spot must be engulfed. Do I hear little Ray calling me? or is it only the furious water howling,—

"Come, come, I will whirl your body round and about, even as your brain is whirling!"

Why have I taken off my coat and hat and laid them on the bench? Is it that I am too warm? No, for the wind blows over the mad white water upon me and I shiver.

I put them on again and return to the second little bridge. There, perhaps, as nowhere else, the supreme majesty and terror of the river is concentrated. There, with a roar as of thunder, conflicting currents do battle among themselves in a splendid glory of emerald and snow and silver.

One single leap, a few moments' flinging from wave to wave, from rock to rock, the brief, bird-like flight through space, then forever rest, rest, unbroken rest.

The water turns to blood and then to fire before my eyes. A hand is laid on my arm.

"Sir, will you please tell me the time?" a lady

asks. She has a pale, sweet, careworn face, something like Mary's,—dear Mary!

I tell her the time, and cross the remaining bridge to Goat Island once more. Somehow I feel safer here,—nearer home, I suppose.

I take the short cut, rambling idly along beneath the noble trees. How true are those lines:

“Come ye into the summer woods,—
There entereth no annoy.”

Oh, the blessed peace and calm of this place! My mind has been a little confused to-day; but here I feel serene again.

I dread, though absurdly enough, to recross the long bridge; I would ask some one to hold my hand as I walk over, only I should be considered insane.

I am nearly over to the mainland now; almost out of danger. Danger? What danger have I been in to-day?

In ten minutes I shall be in the train, going home to Mary and the children.

Good God! what is that in the water? The yellow curls—the child—little Ray has fallen in!

“My boy, my boy! I’ll save you!”

[From a Buffalo paper.]

The body of the unfortunate gentleman who committed suicide at the Falls a week ago to-day, while suffering from a complication of nervous disorders, was this morning recovered at Lewiston.

When the grave low tones of the reader ceased

he was gratified to see that tears were in Bella's eyes. She assured him that he might very well be a novelist, and in fact praised the little sketch so warmly that Stephen could not resist the temptation to show her another of his productions.

"This one is in print, so you can read it for yourself," he said, handing her a slip of paper from his pocket-book. She took it, and read :

BECALMED.

As in the scorching flame of tropic heat,—
 The sun a jewel in the turquoise sky,
 Whose rays, like blows, unceasingly do beat
 The conquered sullen sea,—a ship doth lie
 Becalmed and helpless, while her drooping sails
 Hang gray and heavy on the breathless air :
 So is my life bereft of all the gales
 That onward sweep mankind to do and dare.
 My sluggish days know not the rushing tide
 Of work, nor biting breeze of adverse fate,
 Nor gusts of high ambition, anger, pride,
 Nor joy's soft zephyrs, nor wild winds of hate.
 No passion's tempest shakes me like a leaf,
 Nor do I bow beneath the storm of grief.

"Why, you are a poet!" she cried, in joyful surprise. She did not return the paper, but slipped it between the buttons of her gown.

"A mere versifier," said Stephen, modestly. "A man is mad to write sonnets while Rossetti's yet ring in our ears. This is in the Shakespearian form, the simplest of all."

"It's beautiful,—imagery, structure, everything!" declared Bella. "But, pardon me, is the hopeless state of mind it describes really yours?"

"Not now," said Stephen. "It was when I wrote the poem."

"Oh! And that was—when?"

He paused, and before he spoke his face flushed darkly.

"The day before I met you!"

CHAPTER X.

"By a divine instinct, men's minds mistrust
Ensuing danger; as, by proof, we see
The waters swell before a boisterous storm."

SHAKESPEARE.

THE serenity which had made the first days of Jerome Harvey's visit to Marcy Forrester so agreeable was of short duration. It passed away, and the young man found himself more anxious and disquieted than ever. He chafed somewhat against his enforced idleness, but this was a small factor among the causes of his discontent. He was indignant at his host for keeping him in suspense, and angry at himself for submitting to it; and yet he saw no other course open to him. If he gave up the inquiry and returned to New York, it was not probable that Marcy Forrester would ever again feel the slight approach to a communicative mood which had prompted him to send the telegram. No; Harvey knew that he must be kept dancing attendance on

the old man's whims for an indefinite period, and all he could do was to protest to Brooks against the injustice of the proceeding.

Marcy Forrester, on the other hand, had not for years known so much pleasure as his power over Harvey afforded him. It was delightful to play the tantalizing cat to Jerome Harvey's tortured mouse; to drop an occasional hint of a flourishing family tree and a wealth of relatives in the background, or to flush the young man's cheek by some chance allusion to an ignominious extraction. His tired and flagging pulses received a new stimulus; he felt himself no longer impotent, since he could inflict pain. All this had necessarily an exciting effect upon his nerves; but it was easy to ignore the dangers of an excitement so pleasurable in its quality. He was willing to risk something for the enjoyment of watching his victim's writhings.

It was soon patent to all observers that the victim had writhed himself into feeling a dire need of feminine sympathy, which he accordingly sought from Diana Forrester. But as that young woman listened to all complaints in a blank silence, and at their close calmly advised Harvey to abandon the quest, an interview with her produced anything but a soothing effect. He thought her unresponsive, disagreeable; he was constantly thwarted in his efforts to stir her to some show of interest in his perplexities; but out of this failure grew at last the unconscious determination to rouse some feeling in her. He was possessed by an imperative need to bring the tears to her eyes, the color to her clear pale cheek, and in

this endeavor he felt himself grow more ardent and Pygmalion-like every day.

It was entirely with Stephen Brooks's concurrence that Harvey monopolized Miss Forrester's time; it was, moreover, a matter of daily self-congratulation with him that the fourth member of the quartette was a companion so fully after his own mind. Mrs. Forrester and Mr. Brooks had many things in common besides their literary tastes. They had an instinctive sympathy which enabled each to divine the other's thought when it was but half uttered. Either was ready to resign any opinion at the slightest expostulation of the other, for both had the flexibility of belief and sentiment which, however reprehensible from a moral and intellectual stand-point, makes conversation a delight. Both were in some degree actuated by the principle which had governed Marcy Forrester's life,—the intention to enjoy existence at any cost. Stephen had carried out this intention pretty thoroughly always, and of late even Bella had failed less of her desire than she was accustomed to do. She felt a sense of physical lightness and elasticity, as if she had thrown off a wearisome burden; she seemed to have drunk of some elixir which developed undreamed-of energies and made her capable of undertaking walking and climbing expeditions of stupendous difficulty. She had a child's keen delight in every fresh experience; she was worlds removed from the languid creature who a few weeks before was vainly striving to interest herself in embroidery and charcoal studies.

One July afternoon they all descended into the

gorge below the Falls by the elevator at the Whirlpool Rapids. At this point the bank rises fully three hundred feet high, its gray surface here and there diversified by blood-red strata. Willows clothe the inaccessible stony wall sparsely, as if too timid to put forth a vigorous growth on such slight footing. A few feet from the base of this wall the river dashes furiously along. The same volume of water which at the Falls is diffused over a space four thousand feet in width is at the Whirlpool Rapids crowded, crushed, driven through a narrow gorge of but one-tenth of this width, in a torrent of inconceivable and appalling force. Wreaths and drifts of spray are whirled into the air, and immense cones of water are constantly forming, sometimes thirty feet high. If there is any suggestion of playfulness in this rush and tumble and roar of waters, it is the tigerish glee of huge untamed beasts, as rough and wild in their sportive moods as in their rage.

It being obviously impossible for the party to go in opposite directions upon the one path which extends down-stream from the foot of the elevator, a compromise was effected by Bella and Stephen Brooks seating themselves on some convenient rocks, while the others strolled as far away as the limitations of the spot would admit.

The two thus left behind had just before taking the elevator finished a long comparison of ideas on a certain abstruse subject; they had clearly demonstrated that misery was the allotted portion of humanity on earth and annihilation after death; and it was a little difficult at once to revert from this

gloomy topic to the light and agreeable tone of their usual converse. Presently the young man said,—

"That was a wonderful thing Robinson did,—to pilot the 'Maid of the Mist' through this boiling caldron. He and his men, Jones and McIntyre, are the only creatures who ever came through it alive. Think of his nerve, his coolness, his bravery! It was a grand thing, a thing worth doing!"

"I don't know," demurred Bella. "His wife said he looked twenty years older when he reached home."

"Well, I won't say the experience was worth twenty real years of common life; but surely it was worth the sacrifice of some youthfulness of expression?"

"It would not be so to a woman," said Bella. "Youth and its appearance are worth more to us than all the other things of this world."

"Yes," granted Stephen, "and the happiest time in a woman's life is when she is just old enough to realize that she is still young."

Bella mused a moment; that time had only very lately come to her. "Do you know," she asked, abruptly, "what is my highest ambition,—the one thing of all others I should rather do?"

"I've no idea; pray tell me," pleaded Stephen.

"Well, I should like to charter a big steamboat, or perhaps have one built at the foot of the Falls, and put all my disagreeable acquaintances on board, and send her down through these Whirlpool Rapids without any Joel R. Robinson,—without any pilot at all!"

Stephen laughed. "Frightful vindictiveness!" he said. "Go on; I'm intensely interested to know whom you would doom to the fate of poor Matthew Webb."

Bella laughed a little, too; it was very nice, she thought, to be able to sadden or amuse this man at will. Diana was uniformly shocked, Mrs. Bromley pained, and her husband bored by such disclosures.

"Let me see," she deliberated. "Well, I should put on that steamboat all the people I know who do not play cards."

"Oh, come now!" protested Stephen. "I play myself, of course; but there are lots of first-class people who don't."

"And why do not they? Because they disapprove of it, because it's a waste of time, because it dwarfs the intellect. They insult persons who do play by telling them all this; they behave as if they fancied themselves aureoled saints. Yes, the people who do not play cards are condemned without exception; and, what is more, most of the people who do."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Stephen, aghast at this wholesale denunciation.

"The people who tell you after each hand is played how much better you might have played it; who ask what is trump; who misdeal; who take their partner's trick; who quarrel; who revoke,—these should all go on my steamboat!"

"And the lady who picks up the cards after each and every hand is played, innocently asking, 'Is it my deal?'" inquired Stephen, slyly.

"All young girls," Bella went on, ignoring his question; "in fact, all the youth of both sexes; all unmarried women. I don't know why it is, but the worst possible marriage has an improving effect on a girl's manners; she acquires tact, sympathy, the knowledge of how to be charming."

"I am afraid you would have to build a whole fleet," remarked Stephen.

"And all young married women should go in," pursued Bella. "Either they are so wrapped up in their stupid husbands and children they can talk of nothing else, or they are flirts. A married flirt is detestable!"

The young man wondered in which category she would place herself, but dared not ask. "Widows, of course?" he hazarded.

"No, not one; it's impossible for a widow to be anything but lovely. If she truly mourned her husband she is chastened by her sorrow, and kinder and tenderer ever after; if he was a bad husband she is as happy and charming in her new-found freedom as a child let out of school."

"And they say women cannot generalize!" murmured Stephen.

"People who tell me how many gray hairs I am getting," proceeded Bella.

"Surely they cannot be many," said Stephen; regarding her heavy braids.

"The gray hairs, or the people? There are a great many of the latter, I assure you, but I sincerely trust they have all seen the same single hair. —All the people who eat onions, who jump off street-

cars before they stop, who have a thirst for information, who call me Bell instead of Bella, who play the violin, who giggle at nothing, and who understand latitude and longitude!" concluded Bella.

"Would not you yourself feel rather lonely?" queried Stephen.

"Indeed, no; I should sit on this very stone beside the watery grave of all those uncongenial persons, and exult in the certainty of never meeting them again."

"Well, this is as good a place to sit as any," said Stephen. "I think here at the Whirlpool Rapids one fully realizes the aboriginal idea of the river,—that it is the home of a cruel, angry god, who is always crying for human lives."

"I like a river," said Bella, gazing disparagingly at the mountainous billows before her, "whose source is in the tiniest spring in the woods, where

'Blossoms blue the mosses dot,
Murmuring, Forget me not,—
Dragon-flies flit o'er the spot.'

Then it is a little tinkling brook, then a placid stream in whose brown depths and silver shallows we can watch the trout darting; then it is a broad, calm river upon whose bosom we float unafraid, for we have known it from its babyhood."

"Niagara has no such period of gradual development; it springs full-grown from Lake Erie, as Minerva sprang from the head of Jove," said Stephen. "No, it cannot be called a friendly, companionable stream. We are never at home in it; we can never

forget how many a brave swimmer and oarsman has sunk beneath the treacherous waters.—By the way, Harvey and I have agreed to row across above the Falls as near the brink as it has ever been done."

"Do, by all means!" mocked Bella. "You will gain undying honor if you succeed; if you fail you will only rid the earth of two men so foolish they did not deserve to live!"

"I wonder if I shall look as much older as Robinson did?" laughed Stephen; but the laugh was arrested by an ominous crack in the wall far above his head. He looked up; a fragment of rock at that moment detached itself from a lofty crag and came crashing down with frightful velocity. The young man had only time to seize his companion's hands in his own, crying "Bella, Bella!" and snatch her a hair's-breadth out of its path, when the stone tore violently by and plunged into the river.

They clung a moment, deathly pale, to each other's hands. This vision of sudden death seemed to both of them a less startling thing than that he should have pronounced her name in that way,—as if in his inmost thought she was always "Bella."

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

"Hurt?" she said, vaguely. "No, I am not hurt, thanks to you." She freed her hands, and the color came back to her face in one swift rush.

Diana and Jerome hurried up with heartfelt congratulations on the narrow escape, and no one cared to linger long in the scene of the late danger.

When they parted at the door of Diana's house,

it was a very cold farewell that Mrs. Forrester vouchsafed to Mr. Brooks.

"He must learn that I wish to be given a more conventional title than my Christian name," she said, inwardly, forgetting that "No step backward" is the one infallible rule governing the dealings of men with women, and that Stephen Brooks, having once called her "Bella" would thenceforward artfully contrive never to call her "Mrs. Forrester."

CHAPTER XI.

"Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile."

SHAKESPEARE.

To use his own terse expressions, Marcy Forrester was weakening; he was losing his grip. He knew it by the admonitions of shortening breath and sluggish heart; by the senile tears that rose unbidden to his eyes; by vague and futile promptings in the direction of that Right he had never done and now never could do.

He knew it by the sudden lethargy of mind and body that fell upon him in the first hot August days. He no longer cared to creep about the garden on Philippe's arm, nor to play cribbage with Brooks, nor to read the old French plays with Bella. He grew careless about the garb of his servants, and allowed them to call each other John and Ellen in

his very presence unrebuked. He did not even insist upon Bella's wearing her marquise dress; she had never put it on since that first evening,—she fancied it had brought her ill-luck.

But he recognized the decay of his strength most surely in that worst symptom of all, insomnia. Debarred by his nervous susceptibility from using anodynes, and physically unable to perform exercise, that best sleep-procurer, he was forced night after night to lie awake through the long soundless hours. He regretted nothing he had ever done, and felt no faintest stirrings of an awakening conscience; but for the first time Memory failed of her kindest office, and ceased as utterly to reproduce past pleasures as Hope refused to promise future ones. It seemed to him that he had always lain there, old and helpless, watching the dull gleam of his night-lamp and the slow melting of the ice in the carafe. He wished that his life had been a little better or a little worse; he felt neither satisfaction nor remorse in retrospection; existence had been a mere dead level, after all, void of the heights and depths of joy and sorrow. And whatever it had been, it was over now! Lying there through the long still nights he realized that

"Oh! it is the worst of pain
To feel all feeling die!"

He could devise no amusement, find no companion, to enliven those dread hushed hours. He did not lack courage, and thought often of suicide, with a growing conviction that sooner or later he should resort to it. But not yet, not yet!

One morning about three o'clock he heard a quiet footstep in the hall outside of his room, while through the door, left open for coolness, floated the odor of a cigar.

"Is that you, Brooks?" he called. "For God's sake come in!"

It was not Brooks, but Harvey, whom the heat had rendered sleepless, and who had been sitting on the balcony for an hour. He came into the room, extinguished his cigar, and flung it into the fireless grate.

"Am I equally welcome, Mr. Forrester? I hope I didn't wake you."

"Any human being would be welcome," said the old man, fretfully. "I wish you could have waked me; it would imply that I had slept."

"It's hard not to be able to sleep," sympathized Jerome. "Shall I sit down and talk with you? I wish I had Brooks's range of topics; then I could make myself interesting." He wheeled an easy-chair from a shadowy corner to the bedside and dropped into it. His deep-set eyes looked bright and kindly, and the lines of his tall figure even in repose betokened unwearied strength.

Marcy Forrester tried dreamily to recall some German legend about a vampire who sucks the life-blood of youth to renew its own declining powers. He wished that he were such a vampire; he need not go far to seek a victim! But nothing of this appeared in his weary voice or in his manner, which was marked by a sincerity quite phenomenal. They talked for some time on indifferent matters, while in

each a wavering consciousness grew into certainty that morning would not dawn before the one subject of paramount importance to Jerome should be fully discussed. It was the elder man who first put this feeling into words.

"I suppose, since we are alone and quiet," he said, after a silence, "I may as well tell you to-night the little there is to tell about your mother."

"I wish you would," said Harvey, eagerly, but with a respect born of the other's altered manner. He felt grateful that Mr. Forrester's usual jeers and sneers were for the nonce in abeyance to a graver mien.

"When I first saw her," began the old man, "I was about your present age, and she was just seventeen. Certain schemes had gone wrong with me, and the night before I had been drinking heavily to drown disappointment. I woke with a splitting headache, and went down on one of the docks—it was in New York—to get the ocean breeze. While I was there a steamship came in from California.—I didn't know I could be so truthful and direct; I wonder I'm not saying the boat was from Europe and the girl an Irish emigrant."

"Pray go on!" said Jerome.

"Well, the California steamer came slowly up to the dock. I noticed two people on board, first, because they were so quiet and aimless in the midst of all the hurry, next because of their dress. They seemed to be wearing everything money could buy, heaped upon them with an absence of taste and fitness really pitiful. The girl's jewels would have

graced a ball-room, and the man carried on his watch-chain a small fortune in the shape of a gold nugget. But I am a keen observer, and I knew at once that this was the ostentation of simplicity rather than of vulgarity. The poor things thought gorgeous apparel an irksome but proper badge of their new-found wealth. They were the very last passengers to disembark. As they passed me on the dock I heard the man say, looking about bewildered,—

“‘It’s stranger than the ship, Alice.’

“‘Yes; oh, yes!’ she said. ‘Oh, father, can’t we go back on the ship and not get off, but just go right home again?’

“And I have always believed they would have done so, had I not at that instant politely offered to assist them.”

“That was kind,” said Jerome.

“My motive, however, was no kinder than it has usually been,” said the old man, dryly. “But it almost touched even me to see the childish relief with which they turned to me. I helped them to find a plain boarding-house, not choosing to share my prey with the loungers about a hotel, and I did not leave them till I had taught them to regard me as their dearest friend and benefactor.

“Next day the man told me his history. His wife had died when their little girl Alice was born, and he had lived alone in an Indiana village, working at his trade,—blacksmithing,—until the craze for gold ran like a fever all over the land. Then he took Alice and, with some of the neighbors, went across

the plains on that quest which so many found fruitless, but in which he had been singularly prospered. Every blow of his pick told, and in five years he had amassed wealth. Alice was the idol, and he himself the magnate, of the camp; but he felt it his duty to leave it.

"‘I wanted to put my girl in a fancy school East, and give her them lady airs the women round camps don’t have,’ he explained. And there was another reason: he had had a heart-trouble even before he went to California, and the long delving among the rocks had not improved it. Jerome Harvey had worked hard to pay for this house I am living in, hadn’t he?"

"Was that his name?"

"That was his name,—rather a grand cognomen for a village blacksmith, eh?—Well, he had no relatives and no claim on any one, and he wanted to try to make friends with some nice women in order to leave Alice in their charge.

"‘Was there ever such luck as our meeting you? You are just the man to help us!’ he said again and again, shaking me by the hand, while his rugged face would fairly shine with satisfaction. And Alice, too, would appeal to me in little difficulties every hour or so, for I was with them all day long. They had been so great in their little Western world, and were such mere nobodies in New York; even their wealth was but a pittance there; they were cowed and lonely."

"They were, at any rate, nothing to be ashamed of," said Jerome.

"It was only three weeks after their arrival that I offered to marry Alice. Strange, isn't it, how truthful I am? I might say I never married her,—you'd never know. But I knew well enough I dared not trifle with Harvey, so I proposed to marry her. He couldn't have been more gratified if I had been a prince of the blood royal; he never asked about my means, my family, or anything else. Alice did not love me,—she seemed too timid, too much a child for that,—but she wanted to please her father, and so we were quietly married, and I came to live in the boarding-house too. Then I watched for a chance to carry off all the old fool's money.

"Why, can't you see that I had a certain sort of right to it?" he asked, digressing a moment to reply to Jerome's steady gaze of concentrated scorn. "They couldn't appreciate money; it made them wretched to have it and know they were getting no good of it. They would have really been happier back under the pines, wearing coarse flannels and eating with knives. However, I was not obliged to run off with the money. When Alice and I had been married about three months, she sat one evening playing euchre with her father; it was one of the habits they had brought from camp. At such times they would grow quite merry, and I could see that Alice had not been such a spiritless creature in the old free life. They were very lively this evening, and presently Alice cried out, gayly,—

"'You're euchred, father! you're euchred!'

"'Yes, Alice,' he answered, heavily, 'I'm euchred!'

"I flung down my newspaper and ran to him,

alarmed by his slow thick utterance; Alice's laugh dwindled off into a scared moan; he pressed one hand on his heart and tore with the other at his collar; his face turned gray under our eyes.

"Be kind—kind—to my girl!" he gasped, and the next instant fell forward, stone-dead, down among the cards.

"Well, young fellow, I'm glad I never loved, since love can make people suffer as that poor girl did. For hours she made us try all sorts of vain restoratives; she would not pause to weep, lest precious minutes should be lost so. When at last she was forced to see the truth she sobbed and raved till she fell into an exhausted stupor, from which she only woke to weep and rave again. This continued to be her state for days after the funeral, until I took her to a quiet little town by the sea. There by degrees she grew calmer, though her face never lost the stricken look it took on the night her father died.

"I don't know how I ever got through the months that followed. Harvey had not been such a fool after all, for he had tied up the money so that no one but his daughter could touch it, and she, gentle and timid though she was, was yet determined that every dollar should be kept for the child she expected. Had I not been in serious pecuniary difficulties I should have lost patience and cut the whole thing. As it was, I wonder I didn't poison her. I had the will to do it; but it really seemed as if guardian angels stood between that girl and harm, and afterwards between her baby and harm. And before very long I saw that she would step out of my way

just as her father had done. Strangers used to shake their heads and look mournfully at each other as they passed her sitting on the sands. She liked to listen to the waves,—said the sound made her think of the wind in the pines around the camp. Well, all that summer and autumn she just wasted away."

"You murdered her!" cried Jerome, fiercely. "You let her die of homesickness, poor lonely little thing. The least spark of love would have warmed and cheered her; but you did not give it."

"Don't say did not, say could not," corrected the old man. "It never was in me to love, any more than it is in that girl Diana." He smiled at the strong negation in Jerome's face. "Well, at last October came and the child was born,—yourself. She lay for hours afterwards in a heavy swoon. No one thought she would ever come out of it, but quite suddenly she roused, and in a faint voice directed the nurse to bring her some papers from her trunk,—the bank-books and securities.

"'They're all yours now,—yours and the baby's,' she said, putting them into my hands; she was already too far above the earth to remember her slight distrust of me. Then she seemed to want something else, but was too far gone to tell us what. One of the women fetched a Bible; that was not it. Another spoke of the child; she shook her head. At last the nurse brought the worn old pack of cards that had dropped out of Harvey's dying hand. Alice had never played since, but she often sat clasping her father's cards as if she felt his touch upon

them still. She closed her thin fingers over them now with a sigh of relief.

"'Now she'll look at the baby, last of all, poor lamb,' said the nurse, and she put you on the pillow close to the pinched white face. Alice lifted her eyes in one quick question.

"'It's a boy, my dear, a lovely boy,' sobbed the nurse.

"'Yes,' said the mother, rallying faintly; 'yes,—Jerome Harvey!'

"That was the last. When they buried her, though some of the women thought it wicked, the nurse slipped the old cards under her shroud.

"Then there was only one thing for me to do,—to dispose of you. I never tried so hard to please a living creature as I tried to please those two dead ones. I have never been able to account for it, unless it was that their simple goodness had infected me, and I couldn't at first shake it off. At last I hit upon the plan which I adopted: I placed you with a man as true and straightforward as your grandfather himself."

"For which one thing I thank you," said Jerome. He did not dare to think what Marcy Forrester's own training might have made him.

"Have you ever imagined the feelings of a man cut down when nearly dead from hanging? After the first few agonized, choking breaths, how precious the life so lately jeopardized must seem! Just so I felt when I had left you on Joseph Brooks's doorstep. It was a soft, moonless night, and as I drove along I broke the stillness by exultant whoops and

yells, rising in the buggy now and then to lash the startled horse. Oh, the joy of being forever rid of those people, with their fatuous fondness for each other and their idiotic honesty! I was richer than I had ever hoped to be, and I was free! If any one had met me tearing along that night over the quiet country roads, he would have thought me a demon. I flung behind me the whole year of insupportable dulness I had passed with Alice Harvey, and proceeded to enjoy its reward. Until this spring my mind literally never recurred to that year except when it was time to remit to Joseph Brooks the semi-annual allowance. That, I trust, never failed to reach him?"

"It never failed; but I myself have not touched a cent of the money since I could earn my bread."

"You need have had no scruples; it was honest, hard-earned money, to which you had a perfect right. You have of course a right to another thing,—the name of Forrester."

"I disclaim it!" said the young man with haughty promptness. "I am and shall remain Jerome Harvey!" He rose from his chair and stood beside it erect and firm.

"Your mother left a package for you; you will find it in yonder cabinet. The key is in the lock," said the old man; and as Jerome walked over to the cabinet he followed him with eyes whose hard black glitter was subdued by a certain wistfulness.

The young man readily found a little package wrapped in yellow paper and inscribed in girlish, almost childish, writing,—*"For my Dear Baby."*

With indescribable reverence he broke the seal and looked on the trifles it contained,—a wedding-ring, a lock of soft brown hair and one of grizzled black and white, a golden nugget, and a baby's half-finished silken sock, in which the needle rested still, just as the tired fingers had dropped it. Round the nugget was a scrap of paper marked, "Father used to wear this on his watch-chain."

As he gazed on these things, two great tears gathered in Jerome's eyes. A tenderness beyond words softened the stern outlines of his face. Marcy Forrester, watching him, felt a new, strange impulse, an impulse of pure affection. He raised himself on his elbow.

"My boy, my son!" he called, tremulously.

Jerome glanced sharply up. The tears fell, leaving his eyes hard and cold as ice. "Do not call me son!" he said. "It is my turn to disown you." He paused while he replaced the relics in their wrapper. "I thank you, Mr. Forrester," he went on, "for at last telling me the truth; I thank God, and not you, that no stain lies on my mother's honor; and now I will bid you good-by, for before you are up Brooks and I will be gone."

He strode rapidly to the door. The old man sunk back on his pillow. At that moment the night-lamp flickered and went out.

"Good-by, sir," repeated Jerome, more gently, pausing at the door for a reply. None came; but after a space a long sigh fluttered across the darkness and silence.

Jerome dashed aside the curtains and shutters;

the gray light of dawn streamed over an ashen face, and he saw that Marcy Forrester was deaf to harsh and kindly words alike. He rang the bell, and in five minutes Philippe was riding for a doctor; Celeste was on her knees making a fire in the grate, for the chill of death seemed suddenly to have entered the room; Brooks was holding ammonia to the thin, motionless nostrils; and Harvey had yielded up his resolve to quit the house that morning.

CHAPTER XII.

"Love while ye may; if twain grow into one,
'Tis for a little while; the time goes by,
No hatred 'twixt the pair of friends doth lie,
No troubles break their hearts—and yet, and yet,—
How could it be? we strove not to forget;
We played old parts, we used old names,—in vain,
We go our ways and twain once more are twain."

MORRIS.

HOWEVER alarming in appearance it had been, Mr. Forrester's seizure was a mere fainting fit, from which he was without much difficulty aroused even before the arrival of a physician. When the latter came he declared the attack to have been induced by excitement, and very gently reprimanded his patient for indulgence in too stimulating conversation. Had there been the slightest hope of prolonging the old man's life for more than a very few weeks at farthest, the reprimand would have been stern enough

to be effective; but Dr. Tevan philosophically considered that his patient might as well amuse himself during the short span of earthly existence that remained to him. Dr. Tevan found his own happiness at the domestic hearth and in the calm discharge of duty; still he was not so rigidly virtuous as to grudge Marcy Forrester his less legitimate joys, and could quite understand how he took pleasure in rendering himself obnoxious to relatives and servants.

"Now, Mr. Forrester," was the physician's remonstrance, when he had cleared the room of all intruders, "you have been in a passion, have uttered loud imprecations, and have showered blows upon the object of your wrath. You know you mustn't do so."

"Diagnosis as incorrect as usual," said the old man, with a feeble chuckle. The two were about the same age, but Dr. Tevan, with his ruddy color and well-nourished frame, looked twenty years the younger. "No, doctor, you're entirely wrong. I've not been squabbling; I've had a little sentimental talk with my son, that's all,—the taller of the two young men you just dismissed from the room."

"Your son?" echoed the other, with a whistle of amaze. Marcy Forrester had something to show for his life, after all.

"Yes; my heir also. He has been called, and intends still to call himself, by his mother's maiden name; but she was really my wife. The interview in which I acknowledged him to be my son upset me a little; it was unexpectedly tender and tearful."

"No doubt," said Dr. Tevan, dryly. "Well, Mr.

Forrester, if there are any other young persons to whom you intend to announce yourself as a father, I advise you to perform the ceremony by proxy. I will act in that capacity at any time. Miss Diana, now,—are there no startling disclosures to be made to her?"

"Well, not of a very affecting nature."

"I dare say it's like smoking," said Dr. Tevan. "The first cigar makes one deathly sick, while after that there isn't so much as a qualm. It will be comparatively easy for you to lay claim to a dozen offspring now."

"Tevan, I want you to do me a favor."

"If it is to give you hydrate of chloral, I won't do it."

"Oh, it's not that; I think I shall sleep now."

"I think you ought to, in the consciousness of duty accomplished."

"If I had regarded it as a duty I would never have done it. Tevan, I want you to persuade that young fellow to stay here."

"Here? in your room?"

"No, only in the house, as he has been doing these two months. Tell him every day he stays is a thousand dollars in his pocket; that his going will tear my aged heart-strings to pieces; tell him, in short, any lie you like, only persuade him to stay."

Dr. Tevan laughed. "I've never been able to invent lies in my own time of need, and shall I in behalf of another?" he asked. "However, I'll do my best for you. Now drink this and be quiet. Above

all things, don't recognize any more sons without consulting me."

He administered a soothing draught, talked a little longer, till the old man composed himself to sleep, and then noiselessly left the room. The young men met him at the foot of the stairs.

"How is Mr. Forrester?" inquired Jerome.

"As well as he was yesterday; as well as he will ever be again. You know, do you not, that his death is a mere matter of weeks,—of days, rather?"

"Indeed?" said Jerome. No agony of apprehension was visible in his face.

"Fact, I assure you. Whoever crosses his least wish will make it a matter of hours. By the way, he hopes you will not terminate your visit very soon."

"I am willing to postpone my departure twenty-four hours, not longer."

"Then you will have to return next day for the funeral," said Dr. Tevan. He sternly asked himself if this were not putting it a little too strong; but knew not how to modify his assertion.

"Oh, we're not going to hustle the old chap into his grave that way," declared Stephen. "I'll answer for it that Harvey stays till he wears out his welcome. Won't you wait and have some coffee?" he asked, affably. This hospitality being declined, he walked with the doctor down to the road, and when he had untied the horse, sent a cordial "Drop in any time, doctor!" after the retreating vehicle.

Returning to his friend, the two passed through the house and sat down on the rear veranda. The

atmosphere had the ineffable freshness of early morning; the dew gemmed every rose-spray and grass-blade, and sparkled on the petals of the tall white lilies. The pines at the foot of the garden were not so dense as to exclude glimpses of the Canadian bank, which still lay wrapped in a tremulous, pearly mist.

Jerome, a trifle pale and haggard from his vigil, recounted Mr. Forrester's revelations to Brooks, whose disappointment at the commonplace character of the story no words can express. He had not believed that any episode so conventional as a marriage had marked his host's career, and he was much annoyed by the fact that his acumen had been at fault.

"I can do better than that on paper," he said, dejectedly. "Anything more inartistic I never heard. No love, no crime, no jealousy,—nothing! Of course," more cheerfully, "on your account, old fellow, it's just as well they were married."

"Oh, you really think so?"

"Not only because it makes you feel better, you know, but because at that old rascal's death—I beg your pardon!"

"You may consider the relationship as non-existent," said Jerome. He *is* an old rascal."

"Well, at his death there will be a nice little penny coming to you."

"Do you suppose I would touch a cent of it? It's filthy lucre, if money ever was."

"You don't mean you will refuse to be Mr. Forrester's heir? I only wish I was his son. Perhaps I am! No, that couldn't be——"

"Oh, keep still! No, I am not going to handle money made in gambling-hells, in blackmail, in every species of cheating."

"Why, you're way off! Who wants you to take that ill-gotten wealth? I wouldn't have you do it for the world. All I stipulate for is your taking your grandfather's hard earnings. There's something sublime in the thought that for millions of years frost and fire and all the unseen chemic action of the underworld labored to produce that virgin gold," said Stephen, waxing poetic; "that Mother Earth garnered her treasure safely, closely in her bosom, century after century; that Jerome Harvey slaved and struggled, day in, day out, in snow, sun, wind, in sickness and in pain perhaps, to win that secret hiding-place. I tell you it's consecrated gold, Jerome! I'm not given to fine feelings, but hang me if I like to see money wrung from the very rocks by honest toil wasted and squandered as your grandfather's gains have been and will be!"

Jerome, stirred by this new idea, remained silent. Stephen pursued his advantage.

"This money is yours even now by law; you have no more right to reject it than to cut off an arm or a leg. And think, Jerome! you could not only leave the tread-mill of work; not only travel, enjoy, learn, but you could be a George Peabody in a modest way; you could

'Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
Heal the sick, and lead the blind!'

as mother used to sing."

"There's something in what you say," granted Jerome, "and I don't mind thinking it over. But I must leave here at all events. I should despise myself for lingering now that I have got what I waited for."

"If the old gentleman is really as ill as Dr. Tevan says, are you still bent upon going?"

"Decidedly. I shall depart as soon as Mr. Forrester recovers from this present attack. He has no claim upon me which I acknowledge."

"Do you think that because he was a bad father you have a right to be a bad son?" demanded Stephen, sternly. "True, he abandoned you in helpless infancy; but it was to leave you in care more tender than his own. He gave you at least all you needed; will you give him nothing in return?"

"Can I give him love, obedience, filial respect, at a moment's notice?" asked Harvey. "You could, very likely; I am not so tractable."

"You might stay by him and keep him company in these last days; it won't be for long," urged Stephen. "It's cruel of you, Jerome, to leave the poor old fellow so lonely and unfriended. The tie between you is none of your making, to be sure; nevertheless, it binds you fast."

Jerome had rarely seen his friend in this virtuous mood, and the unwonted seriousness of Brooks's argument was not without its effect on him. He had never disregarded the call of duty; if it summoned him now to watch by his father's dying bed, he would do so.

"Besides," proceeded Brooks, descending to a

lower plane, "have you no inclination to prolong your flirtation with Miss Diana?"

"Oh, as to that, I can write."

"Are you sure she is sufficiently interested in you to read your letters?"

"She might not," confessed Jerome. "But it's useless to deny it, Stephen, you have some axe of your own to grind in all this. What is it?"

"Then you don't believe that I surrender New York in August for this shady retreat from pure unselfishness?" said Stephen. He had a fleeting impulse to make a clean breast of his motives; but Jerome, with his slight pallor and fatigue, had more than ever the air of a severe young monk, and he refrained. "The fact is," he said, gravely, "I'm taking notes for an elaborate series of historical sketches concerning this locality, and of course it would add to their color and picturesqueness could I remain on the spot a little longer."

"Good for you, old fellow!" said Jerome. "I always thought you had it in you to do some first-class work. I see no reason, however, why you should not stay alone; you are surely more welcome than I."

"What! linger on here when the rightful scion of the house is gone, to cheat you of your inheritance and your father's last blessing?" said Stephen; his laugh was a little forced, for he found a certain element of pathos in his friend's perfect trust. "No, Jerome, let us both make our holiday a little longer; the rest is doing you good; I haven't seen you looking so well in years; let us see our host afloat on Styx; promise, won't you?"

"Oh, I dare say I shall; I seem to have no will of my own lately," grumbled Jerome.

"That's a nice boy!" said Stephen.

The odor of coffee had been for some time wafted out to where they sat, and at this moment Philippe rang the breakfast bell. Jerome led the way into the dining-room, and as Stephen followed him he smiled at the "pilulous smallness" of the circumstances which determine human conduct. The historical studies were of course a pure figment, and he would have permitted Harvey to return to New York without a protest had Bella Forrester's blue-gray eyes been one whit less innocent and appealing; had she praised less warmly the verses he constantly submitted to her criticism; nay, had she even chosen to wear pink beads instead of the pale yellow ones that suited her round white throat so well.

The person to whom Mrs. Forrester's mental and physical graces should have been objects of supreme importance—namely, her husband—was at the close of this day seated on Mrs. Bromley's veranda. He was permitted to sit there as often as was consistent with that lady's avowed intention of furnishing no occasion for gossip. He was devoted to children, and not only said but actually thought that Mrs. Bromley's little girls were the loadstars which drew him to her house. The children retired early, however, and on this evening the conversation was not enlivened by their chatter. A stream of water descended from the hose, manipulated by a boy on the sidewalk, over lawn and pavement, diffusing a grate-

ful coolness through the surrounding air. A light breeze shook the shining wet leaves of lilacs and laburnums till they made a dark glitter in the rays of the street lamps. Now and then a bicycle flashed rapidly by on the asphalt, silent as a ghost. From other not distant verandas the low hum of voices, broken occasionally by a low ripple of laughter, floated across the intervening shrubbery; the soft continuous sprinkle and patter of the water lulled Jack Forrester's busy brain to rest.

That was after all the simple secret of Mrs. Bromley's attraction for him,—in her presence he found rest. She had not to his knowledge one single vanity, caprice, or affectation; she demanded neither flattery nor pity, neither slavish obedience nor unremitting attentions. It seemed to him that she never spoke till he was on the eve of wishing her to speak; that she always said the one thing he had been vaguely and indefinitely hoping she would say.

"John," she observed, this evening, with some degree of earnestness, "I am thinking about Bella."

"So am I," he responded. "Do you know, I think it's the best thing that ever happened, her going away for all summer like this, instead of a few weeks at a crowded sea-side hotel. Her mind will recover its tone,—if it ever had any tone,—and she will be a new woman this autumn."

"How was she looking when you were down there last week?"

"Splendidly! never saw her looking better. You hear from her every few days, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; she writes long lively letters, and seems to be in the best spirits," said Mrs. Bromley. After a moment she sighed.

"Why that sigh?" inquired the gentleman. "*You* are not going to do puzzling things, I hope? It's unaccountable, your sighing because your dearest friend is in good spirits."

"I was only thinking it must be somewhat dull for Bella," said Viviette. She flushed guiltily; but through the gloom John could distinguish the outlines only of her face and black-robed figure.

"Dull? You know nothing about it. There are two young men at my uncle's,—his sons, I fancy, who will cut me out of his money,—and Bella seems to enjoy herself immensely. One is a tall, lanky chap, too quiet and sober; the other is more in Bella's style,—a sort of Sir Isaac Newton, you know, intellectual and literary. He doesn't look it at all; he's rather thick-set, drinks a little, smokes incessantly; but Bella said of course he would not present the profound side of his nature to me."

Mrs. Bromley, secure in the darkness, smiled and said nothing. Bella had given her full analyses of the young men's characters, and had invested that of Sir Isaac Newton's antitype with a subtle charm her husband had failed to reproduce.

"Wild horses couldn't drag you, I suppose," Viviette said at last, "to be jealous of either of those young men?"

"Jealous? No! Bella adores me, worships me. Why, I remember when we first kept house——"

"Oh, John, that was years and years ago! You

have changed since then; do you suppose she hasn't?"

"If you mean to insinuate, Viviette Bromley, that I am not as kind and considerate a husband as there is in Buffalo, you are mistaken."

"John, the French say that every woman has two love-affairs. Bella told me that herself."

"Then, of course, it's true."

"And Bella has not yet had the second one."

"Neither have you," was the neat retort swallowed just in time.

"And I should think it might just occur to you that this summer, when you only see her once a week, and sometimes not so often——" She hesitated.

"Viviette," said the man, turning upon her the reproachful gaze of wounded confidence, "I never thought *you* would try to make me imagine things that aren't so." He pondered a moment. "Suppose they are so, do you suppose I'm going to deny her a harmless little flirtation, if that happens to be the one amusement she craves just now? Bella can take care of herself, I guess. And, anyway, she'll drop it in a month or so, like everything else."

Viviette gave a low relieved laugh. "Then I've not poisoned your mind against your wife?" she asked.

"Not at all," said Mr. Forrester. "It looks odd, I know; it looks like a separation; but I'm convinced it's the best thing. If Bella wishes to leave home for six months, and if I'm willing to have her do so, then why on earth shouldn't she go?"

"Why, indeed?" echoed Mrs. Bromley. But when he had gone and she sat alone in the dark veranda, she rejoiced that her departed husband had never regarded her absences from home, however short, with such cheerful resignation.

CHAPTER XIII.

As some young laughing child may stand
Rose-footed in the snowy sand,
Nor dare for all the realm of France
One single further step advance,
The while with dimpling sweep and swirl
The gentle wavelets creep and curl
About the tender timid feet,
To ripple back in murmurs sweet,—

So on the brink of deadly sin
A soul shall shrink from plunging in,—
Yet lingers still, with smiling eyes,
Where fell temptation darkling lies.

CERTAIN misgivings which had floated, vague and nebulous, through Mrs. Bromley's brain, formulated themselves shortly after the conversation above recorded into a distinct anxiety. Bella's letters, written on creamy paper of exquisite smoothness, and sealed with the dainty device of a harebell, gradually lost their usual ingenuous tone; they still breathed a spirit of delight, but the specific causes of that delight were no longer enlarged upon. When Viviette

had received four letters containing little else than descriptions of scenery and reviews of books, her anxiety became intolerable, and she resolved if possible to end it.

As a consequence, one August morning she rang the bell at Miss Forrester's door. Maggie, the servant, ushered her into the shady parlor, and went in search of Mrs. Forrester. She was found seated under the pines at the foot of the garden, and having given her companion, Mr. Brooks, the briefest possible dismissal, hastened into the house, and in a moment the two women were fondly embracing.

"Oh, Viviette! It's so long since I've seen you! You're like a spectre out of the dim forgotten past! What have you come for? Not from pure love, surely?"

"Yes, dear; I came because I fancied you needed me. Have you nothing to tell me, Bella?"

"To tell you? How could there be any news in this seclusion? I'm trying to be good, that's all."

"And don't you call that news?" smiled Viviette. Then, still holding Bella's hand, she drew her to a lounge, and the two sat down side by side; she gazed at Bella with eyes of wistful questioning, and suddenly kissed her again.

"There are a hundred reasons, dear Bella," she declared, impressively, "why you should remain here no longer; why you should return home with me this very afternoon."

"Impossible! I couldn't think of such a thing. Didn't I burn my bridges behind me when I left those P. P. C. cards? Six months' absence is the

very least that will justify those cards. People would laugh at me if I came home now."

"I wouldn't mind their laughing so long as they do nothing worse. You may be sorry some time that you did not brave a laugh, and so avoid being sneered at and scorned and cut dead on the street!"

"What do you want me to come home for? Give me one of your hundred reasons."

"Well, it is hinted that Mr. John Forrester spends too many of his evenings on a certain veranda."

"It's your veranda, of course! It's just like Jack's selfishness to make you talked about. I wonder you let him."

"And Bella, Buffalo is the best place in the world during the hot weather. Even at noon refreshing breezes sweep through the streets. And then, towards evening, to drive along 'The Front' by the river——"

"It's just as cool here, Viviette, and we have the same river at the foot of the garden. It's an earthly Paradise here; why do you try to drag me away from it?"

"I don't know why, Bella; but I feel that you had better come home with me. I thought words would be given me to say, to persuade you; but I can think of none. I only know that you are in danger."

"What has made you think so?" asked Bella, regarding her friend quite calmly.

"Your letters."

"My letters? You must see that I'm happy, Viviette, from every word I have written, from the

very expression of my face. Do you grudge me my happiness?"

"Dear Bella, no; I was as glad of it at first as if some good fortune had befallen myself. But lately you have not been frank and open with me. When I read your letters it seems as if your heart was shut out of them and barred away from me. I want your confidence, Bella."

"You have always possessed it, and never more so than now; only there is nothing to tell."

"Yet I constantly perceive that you are keeping back something from me. At first you used to write fully of your walks and talks with this Mr. Brooks; now you never mention his name. Why is it?"

Bella changed color twice before she answered; she was pale when she said at last, in a whisper,—

"Nothing has happened but trifles, and yet they seemed too important to put on paper."

Mrs. Bromley started. "Then I have come too late!" she said. The tears rose to her eyes, and she pressed her handkerchief to them.

"Of what do you accuse me?" asked Bella, quietly.

"Don't say accuse, Bella. I only warn you to cease flirting with Mr. Brooks."

"Viviette, you grieve, you anger me! How dare you apply such a word to my conduct?"

"It's an ugly, coarse, vulgar word, I admit, but there seems to be no other."

"He says things to please me, and I say things to please him, and that's all there is of it."

"And pray what do you call that but flirting?"

The fact that you are a married woman makes it unchangeably and forever wrong for you to take pleasure in such conversation."

"That's a sterner code of morals than you yourself live up to, Viviette," retorted Bella.

"I might answer," said Mrs. Bromley, "that I am not a wife, but a widow. Bella, do you no longer love John?"

"Love, love! you seem to think of nothing else, Viviette. Let me tell you, when one has been married eight years one regards one's husband as an acquaintance, a friend, an enemy,—never as a lover."

"When you say 'one has' and 'one does,' I always know you have been reading French."

"Reading,—yes, that's just it. We never talk about anything but books. He has read everything I ever heard of; he has read Lecky's 'History of Morals' all through."

"It doesn't seem to have done him much good."

"And he likes being with me——"

"Oh, of course Mr. Brooks knows enough to admire a pretty woman!"

"Thanks, dear. He is the only person who takes me for all in all and is content with me. You and Jack are always finding fault and begging me to have a little energy, a little self-reliance, a little this or that. But Stephen Brooks! He thinks me perfect just as I am." She paused, blushing and smiling; it was the other's turn to be pale.

"My poor girl! that you should think, should speak of him so!" Viviette murmured.

"All women love flattery; you know it, Viviette;

you are pleased when my husband gazes at you with that blissful, contented air, and praises your children, and talks of the blessed repose of your home. Why should you quarrel with Mr. Brooks because he finds me—as John finds you—a charming companion?”

Mrs. Bromley, thus thrown on the defensive, hesitated. “If that were all,” she said, after a moment, “I should not mind. But, oh, Bella! Perhaps you are more charming than you think; perhaps it will end by his falling in love with you; or, worse still, by the contrary event.”

“I wish one of those two most unlikely things would happen,” said Bella, with a sigh. “Oh, to go back to the days when I first knew Jack! How full the world was of hope and song and glory! But that’s impossible; I shall never care for any one again.”

“Even if you could, it wouldn’t be like that first love,” observed Viviette.

“No,” admitted Bella. “The moral of the whole affair is that an idle brain is Satan’s workshop; if I had any object in life; if I were interested in bacteria, or saving up money to buy a sealskin sacque, or learning to walk the tight-rope, I should not care a button what Mr. Brooks reads or does not read.”

“Oh, Bella! Don’t make a jest of it!” implored Viviette. She recognized that no errand could have failed of its object more completely than hers had done, and she felt an excess of veneration for Luther, Wiclif, and other great reformers; it was not, after all, an easy thing to accomplish a mission. Before she could put forward any further considera-

tions the door opened, and Diana entered and greeted the visitor cordially. She had dismissed the carriage which brought Viviette from the village, and insisted upon her remaining to luncheon.

They partook of that refecton, with its cool green salad, pale coral-red tomatoes, great shining blackberries, and crystal pitcher full of yellow cream, and after a repose of an hour or so Bella and Viviette seated themselves in Mr. Forrester's phaeton, and drove to the village.

Just as they passed the post-office Stephen Brooks, who had been mailing some manuscripts, came out of the building. He lifted his hat, and Bella returned the salute, informing her friend in the briefest brace of syllables that this was the gentleman they had been discussing. Something in her expression as she drove leisurely onward made Viviette see that all her remonstrances might as well have been addressed to the wind.

"He must have walked from home," remarked Bella, as they stopped at the dépôt. "How fortunate that I am here to drive him back!"

"I have half a mind to prevent it by going back with you myself," said Viviette.

"Would you condemn poor John to a desolate evening?" asked Bella, demurely.

They went out to the train, kissed each other with much tenderness, and presently Mrs. Bromley was borne away towards Buffalo, her emotions resembling those of a mother forced to leave her child perishing in a burning building.

While Bella and her friend were driving, while

Stephen Brooks was mailing his papers, while, in short, all the commonplace, every-day business of life was going on, Diana Forrester was listening to a declaration the like of which had never astonished her ears. She was seated in her parlor; the coolest gray shadows and half-tints lay in the folds of her white dress; she was arranging some green moss and ferns about a block of glittering ice in the centre of a glass salver,—a transient but refrigerant decoration,—while Jerome Harvey, seated opposite her, announced in the fervid language usually employed on such occasions, that he loved her and wished to make her his wife. At the first appreciable pause Diana declined the honor, but the young man, nothing daunted, proceeded to urge his suit all over again, only to be once more rejected. This process had been repeated several times when Diana remarked, with a touch of impatience,—

“I am surprised that you should have forgotten; I told you at the very outset of our acquaintance that I did not intend to marry.”

“Neither did I,” said Jerome, “and until I met you it required no effort to keep to that intention. But now a feeling has taken possession of me which makes it supremely, divinely right for me to marry you,—the only right and unavoidable thing in the world.”

Diana daintily adjusted the last fern to her satisfaction, rose, and set the little green oasis upon an adjacent table. “I see no reason,” she said, calmly, resuming her seat, “why you should expect me to share your feeling.”

"Oh, if you do not care for me," said Jerome, the buoyant ring of his voice somewhat dashed, "of course that is the end of it all!—No, it's not the end, it's only the beginning. I shall find a way to make you care for me."

Diana smiled incredulously. "Do you think so?" she asked. "I cannot imagine such a state of feeling."

"It's very easily realized, I assure you," Jerome returned, also smiling. He felt a not unnatural confidence that, his own objections to marriage being overruled, the lady's also would prove susceptible of nullification.

"Ah, well!" said Diana, carelessly. "I neither intend to make any effort in that direction myself, nor shall I allow you to do so. I really think you had better go back to New York."

She spoke with an absence of coquetry and embarrassment for which neither Jerome's reading nor observation furnished any precedent. He was amazed that all he had said had produced absolutely no impression; he knew not how to climb or undermine or otherwise encounter this blank wall of indifference; he seemed to himself bereft of ingenuity, and felt that he was cutting a very poor figure. In a moment, however, his native courage reasserted itself.

"It shall be my task to conquer this opposition," he said. "I would not have it otherwise. I would not have you one whit less coy and shrinking——"

Diana stared, then laughed. "I don't think those adjectives describe my attitude towards you very well," she said.

"I am not afraid of failure," said Jerome. "I shall be able to melt your coldness and reserve just as the ice in this crystal dish is melting."

"It *is* melting, isn't it?" said Diana, with solicitude. "And I so wanted it to last till Bella reached home. There! I hear wheels now; it is the phaeton."

"Yes; Mrs. Forrester has picked up Brooks on the way," said Jerome, looking out. He recognized with surprise that the interruption was not unwelcome to him. "They are coming in. You do not dismiss me altogether?" he said, hurriedly. "I may speak to you again?"

Diana considered; his avowals had a piquant and unwonted flavor which she was nothing loath to taste again; she would not say yes, but she did not say no; and Jerome had just time to thank her for this silent permission, when the others entered.

"We faint, Diana, we expire with heat and thirst," said Bella, leading the way into the dining-room. On the sideboard stood a large silver pitcher gemmed with moisture; the ice tinkled musically against the lip as Stephen raised it.

"What pretty glasses!" he remarked, inspecting Diana's many-tinted tumblers.

"I choose the amber one,—yellow is becoming to me," said Bella.

"And I the ruby, because it makes the water look like wine," said Stephen.

They drank each other's health in the pure liquid, and then, Stephen declaring himself much refreshed, the young men took their departure in the phaeton.

"Diana!" called Bella, yet, lingering in the dining-

room. "May I take one of these tumblers up-stairs to put my flowers in?"

"Certainly; colored glass is vulgar, and it's going out of style, and I don't care how soon mine is all broken," answered Diana; and after much deliberation Bella selected one and carried it off to her room. She filled it with water and flowers, and placed it on her desk; a single ray of late sunlight penetrated the shutter and striking through the glass fell in a rosy glow upon the sheets of letter-paper. Bella felt that she was justified in her choice.

"Yes, it *is* prettier than blue," she averred.

Meanwhile, Jerome had turned to Brooks with a meek inquiry; the latter's amative experiences for the first time were of value in his friend's eyes.

"Stephen," he asked, humbly, "how is it you know when a girl is in love with you?"

"Oh, there are ever so many signs," said Stephen, airily. "She will not meet your eyes, for one thing; if a woman looks straight at you she doesn't care for you. That's infallible."

Jerome was silent, recalling the fact that Diana's brown eyes had not once sought the floor during their interview.

"And then," pursued Stephen, with interest, being launched on a subject which he felt he could treat with eloquence, "you may know by her voice: though it be ordinarily trumpet-clear, it softens, 'it hath a dying fall,' when she converses with the man she loves."

Diana's quiet voice had certainly not been any more quiet than usual.

"Or you may know—— Great Scott! Jerome, you are not really struck with Miss Forrester? I thought it was only the sort of idle flirtation in which every man gets entangled during a summer holiday. You don't mean to say you would really marry her?"

"I would—I may say I will!"

"Why, you must be mad! You cannot ignore the probability that you and she come within the proscribed limits of consanguinity. You are Marcy Forrester's son; suppose she turns out to be his daughter?"

"It cannot be so!" cried Jerome. "Of course the thought has occurred to me,—I should have been an idiot if it had not,—but I know it is not so. Something would have warned me, some subtle intuition——"

"Yes; you are just the one to be warned by a subtle intuition!" said Stephen. "I will bet you anything you like that Diana Forrester is your half-sister."

"I will not think so for an instant," said Jerome. "Of course I must learn the truth. I have already spoken to Mr. Forrester on the subject. But it seems brutal to stand threatening and reviling over that quivering heap of nerves."

"Should think you'd enjoy it."

"Especially since his mouth is closer locked every time I address him. But I can endure it no longer; I shall make a mighty effort to extract the truth."

"I wish you success!" said Stephen, reining in the horse before Marcy Forrester's door. Philippe came out to meet them; he had some weeks before dis-

carded the French garments, and now wore what he liked. As he advanced, the young men could not fail to perceive that his face evinced subdued yet unmistakable satisfaction."

"What's the good news?" asked Stephen.

"Dr. Tevan was here for an hour, sorr; an' whin he left he sez to me, 'Yer masther 'll niver set fut to flure ag'in; an' what's more, Siptimber 'll see the lasht av him!'"

CHAPTER XIV.

"Demand me nothing: what you know, you know,—
From this time forth I never will speak word."

SHAKESPEARE.

DURING the few days that remained of August and throughout the greater part of September, Marcy Forrester's conduct was simply maddening. He was deprived of the faculty of locomotion, and was no longer able to read, to hear anything read, or to add the last finishing touch to his Memoirs, now nearly completed. Yet his malignity suffered no diminution, nay, rather seemed to flourish the higher as his other powers declined. He lay propped up among his pillows, his black eyes, bright and cunning as a rat's, following the movements of the hapless wretches doomed by interest or duty to attend upon him. For days at a time he refused to speak, and while it was a relief to have his rancorous and biting utterance checked, Jerome trembled with ap-

prehesion lest he should choose never to break his silence, and so should die with the secret of Diana's birth untold. All the fear, shame, anxiety, the young man had felt on his own account were now transferred to Diana's, and he besieged his father with the humblest entreaty and the sternest expostulation.

It was quite in vain. The old man was keenly mortified by the recollection of the momentary softness to which he had given way when he told Jerome his mother's story. He felt it to be totally unaccountable and inconsistent with his character, and he resolved upon redeeming his pretensions to utter hardness of heart.

"Tell me, so that you may die in peace," implored Jerome, one morning which they had all thought the sick man would never see.

"So that you may live in peace, you mean," Marcy retorted. "Can you doubt that she is your sister? Can you not trace in both your characters," he went on, with the greatest difficulty, "the same veneration for truth, the same lofty ideals, the high, pure, knightly nature that I possess?"

"You are only jesting," said Jerome. "I do not ask your own history,—I will not stir the foul depths of that,—but I must know about Diana. Will you not do this one kindness for the son of the woman whose money has supported you in luxury these many years?"

The memory of the shy, neglected girl who had given her life and fortune into his hands had always been hateful to Marcy Forrester, and the mention of

her now roused him to a white-heat of fury. He raised himself on his elbow.

"As God is my witness, I speak truth!" he cried. "Diana is my daughter. Her mother was the vilest wretch I ever knew. You are brother and sister. My curse upon you both!"

He dropped back exhausted, and the fury in his face died away, to be succeeded by a malign triumph. At this moment Diana came through the open door; she had been up all night, like all the others, and was looking pale and tired. A new softness grew in her face as she advanced to Jerome.

"I heard it all," she said, and he had never thought there could be such a tremor, such a ripple of emotion in her voice. "I heard it," she repeated, "and I think—Jerome! brother!—I think it must be true."

"It is not true!" cried Jerome, violently. "God could not be so cruel!" In the midst of his rage and disappointment he felt a fresh quiver of pain at her ready acceptance of their altered relation.

"I refuse to doubt it," said Diana, gently. "I have needed some one like you, oh, so many times! Let it be as if we met this moment for the first time!" She slipped her hands into his and clasped them close, while Jerome stood in a wretched silence.

"Go on, go on!" chuckled the old man, feebly. "I remember something like this in a French play!"

"You will forget those other feelings in a little while," said Diana. "I will help you. We can be very happy together; we can travel——" She paused, shrinking and blushing before the unsubdued fire in the young man's eyes. The slow un-

ready color added the last touch of perfection to her, Jerome thought.

"Oh!" cried the poor fellow, "do you think that being kinder and gentler and more womanly than you ever were before is the way to make me forget?" He flung away her hands and turned to Marcy. "I do not believe one word you have said. You shall not dare to die until I have learned the truth!" Fearful that he should altogether lose control of himself, he dashed out of the room, down the stairs, and into the open air.

"Diana," drawled the old man, "reach me that atropia on the mantel-shelf. It would be a good joke to kill myself before he gets back. What! You won't? Away with you, then!" And Diana, clapping her hands to her ears, fled before a storm of opprobrious epithets and oaths.

Stephen, seeing his friend rush by, hatless, and with a mien suggestive of suicide, followed leisurely, and overtook him at a point half-way between the two houses, where, under the belt of pines that skirted the bank, stood a small summer-house. Stephen had dubbed it "The Lover's Rest," because none but lovers could be oblivious of the gnarled and knotty inequalities its rustic seats presented to back and shoulders. He did not tempt their afflictive powers, but seated himself on the threshold, while Jerome paced up and down the walk outside, with a countenance on which was depicted a variety of gloomy emotions.

"Stephen, she is my sister, after all!" he burst out in a piteous tone. "And I love her, Stephen; you,

who have frittered away your heart in so many flirtations, cannot imagine, cannot dream how I love her!"

"Yes," mused Stephen, "there must be a certain force in a passion that comes as late as yours. Fancy having one's first love at thirty!"

"I've kept quiet about it; I've not said much; but it has grown with every day of this summer. She is so sweet, Stephen, so fine and dainty in all her ways. Such little, little hands! And just now, when she put them into mine, I could not even press them!"

"And she's so sympathetic, so full of girlish tenderness, so easily swayed by your mood, so full of smiles, tears, sighs, blushes, all enticing wiles and witcheries!" chimed in Stephen, who privately considered Miss Forrester a combination of all the qualities detestable in woman.

Jerome stared, then honestly accepted the ironic eulogy. "Yes; you cannot praise her too highly," he said. "Oh, Stephen, it cannot be true! She loves me, I am sure of it. If you had seen her turn to me and clasp my hands, telling me she had often longed for some one like me!"

"Did she, indeed?" asked Stephen, with animation. It was in keeping with Diana's general insensibility that she should find nothing embarrassing in the situation; but he had not supposed her capable of the sisterly regard Jerome described.

"And then, when I rejected her and would have none of her as a sister, she looked so grieved. It's horrible, Stephen! If I could once know it irrevocably true, I would give it up. But I—we—can

never know. We may be forbidden to love, or we may be free as air; the bare possibility that we are related will suffice to keep us apart."

Stephen for a moment contemplated offering to invent a pedigree and forge a marriage certificate that should resolve all difficulties; but a glance at Harvey, with his troubled eyes and brow contracted in a frown of pain, restrained him. He, too, frowned as he said,—

"It's incredible, the brood of evils that can spring from one man's sin or selfishness! evils innumerable, relentless, unending as Time itself. The troubles that beset you now probably represent the wrongdoing of one single year. If such seed of insincerity, falsehood, double-dealing, was sown in every year of this man's life, what myriad crops of sorrows stand ready for the reaping now!" He was thinking that but for Marcy Forrester's shirking of responsibility thirty years ago he himself would not now be involved in certain hazardous if agreeable complications.

"Can any one man have effected so much good?" asked Jerome, in a temporary lapse of faith.

"No," said Stephen, promptly. "Evil has thrice the reproductive power of good. I tell you, Harvey, that old wretch lying there preaches a sermon,—a stronger one than my father ever preached."

"You don't believe it,—my loving her so!" Jerome burst forth again, after a pause. "I don't blame you; I can't understand it myself. I was always so calm and collected; I've looked at girls and said to myself, 'Not pretty enough; not gentle, not thoughtful enough, for me!'"

"Never felt just that way myself," observed Stephen. "Each one has always been good enough for me—for a time."

"But now,—why, I hardly know whether or not she is pretty at all. It doesn't make the least difference about any of those things. She is Diana; she is the only woman on earth for me!" Jerome uttered each succeeding truism as if it were an astounding revelation.

Brooks regarded his friend with an expression half tender, half sneering. Centuries away seemed the brief season of his boyhood when these sentiments had been for the first time inspired in his breast by some maiden whose very name he had now forgotten.

"Yet I can see how it has all come about," pursued Jerome. "All my life I have wished for kindred, for a mother and sisters of my own; your mother was kindness itself to me, but nobody knows the value of ties of blood as orphans and aliens do; and since I know I can never find them——"

"You seek a substitute; your affection clings, vine-like, to the first object it encounters," said Stephen; and now the sneer had wholly obscured the tenderness in his face. "It's the old inevitable attraction of propinquity; the nearest is ever the dearest; Adam would have loved Pallas Athene instead of Eve if she had happened to come in his way. You turn to Miss Forrester; John Forrester, I wager, begins to think more than he ought of the pretty widow who came down here the other day; and I——" He stopped abruptly.

Jerome did not press him to continue these profound observations. "It's as if I had been waiting for her, longing for her, ever since I was born," he went on. "She refused me, of course; I expected that, for she's not a girl to give up her heart to any man on a three months' acquaintance. I liked her refusing me; she needed time to think it over; it was all coming right; but now,"—he paused, and stood motionless, with bowed head and an air of the deepest dejection,—*now*, things have gone all wrong, blindly, madly wrong!"

"And 'chaos is come again,'" said Stephen, gently. He recalled a conversation held on the Third Sister Island when the by-gone summer was in its first youth. Surely Jerome Harvey was in the rapids now!

Marcy Forrester, left alone, meditated a few moments. "I thought I could hate no one as I hate that white stone Diana," he said, inwardly. "But my son,—detestable prig!—I execrate, I abhor him! To think that in this last hour of decrepitude and death I can still thwart and harry and torment them!" A smile disfigured his face. "It will probably kill me outright," he mused. "But what of that? I shall at least die in the harness." He rang the bell, and as the servant entered, "John!" he said,—“yes, you're Philippe no longer, I'm done with affectations,—help me to dress.”

And John, who would scarcely have been more surprised if the very dead had walked, assisted him to rise and to put a few garments on his attenuated frame.

"Has Mrs. Forrester gone home?" asked the old man; his very voice had attained new strength, and no longer quavered as it had done of late.

"No, sorr; she an' Miss Diana is lyin' down in wan of the shpare rooms. They're waitin' to hear what the docthor says. An' her husband is comin' from Buffalo on the nixt train. There's no sinse in yer gittin' up like this, Mr. Forresther; ye're expected to die before night."

"I expect it myself," said Marcy, cheerfully, "and a welcome change it will be from this sloth's life. Go and tell Mrs. Forrester to come here; but don't let the other one hear you."

The man left the room. Marcy walked or rather tottered to the cabinet where Jerome had found the memorials of his mother. He unlocked the cabinet, took from it a small flat letter-case of metal, which he put in his coat-pocket, and was about to turn away when a golden gleam caught his eye, and he drew forth from a corner of the cabinet a ring of quaint design, lit with a large yellow topaz. He looked at it with a smile of pleased remembrance and slipped it on his finger.

At that moment Bella entered the room; she wore a wrapper of white wool, and, as usual, the amber beads encircled her neck; a long silver pin, shaped like Neptune's trident, was thrust through the loose masses of her brown hair. Her eyes were heavy and her cheeks pale with watching; but a divine tenderness illumined her face. Her heart was sore almost to bleeding for this old man who was hurrying to his grave unloving and unloved.

"Dear Uncle Marcy, you will tire yourself out!" she remonstrated. "Please go back to bed!"

"Give me your arm,—and yours, John," was his answer. "Now, down-stairs,—I am going out into the garden."

Slowly they descended. When they reached the lower floor Bella begged him to pause awhile.

"I'll rest to-morrow well enough," he said, with a cackling laugh, and it was not until they had traversed the hall, the rear veranda, and the garden, and had almost reached the belt of pines, that he began to falter and consented to rest a moment on a lawn settee.

"'Tis the lightening before death," John had said when he summoned Bella, and she too recognized the wondrous brief revival of expiring forces that sometimes comes before their final extinction.

"I couldn't have done it, Bella," he said, as if in answer to her thought, "but for this ring. A half-dead Malay gave it me twenty years ago in exchange for some opium; he said it was a talisman, and would bring strength and speedy death to whoever wore it."

"Of course that can't be true, Uncle Marcy," said Bella, gently.

"I don't know; I've never dared to put it on till now. Since you're so brave, you may wear it after me. It *has* given me strength; if it will only last!"

"What is it you wish to do?" asked Bella. She knew that his purpose must be vindictive, but she could not guess its direction; she feared he meant

to precipitate himself over the bank before her eyes. She looked anxiously round for the young men, but they were not in sight.

"If it will only last!" he repeated. He leaned heavily against John and breathed rather quickly for a few moments, while he waited for a fresh accession of vital energy. At last, with aid, he rose, and walked, more slowly than before, to the pines and under them, till the three stood on the very verge of the chasm. Then he suddenly disengaged his right arm from Bella's and put his hand into his coat-pocket. He raised his hand high above his head and with one supreme effort which transcended all his former exertions he flung something—a small metallic object—into the abyss.

"Oh, what have you done?" cried Bella.

"It's Diana's,—tell Jerome," began the old man, but stopped, stammering and gasping. His false strength was passing; in a flash it had passed, and he dropped in a helpless heap on the ground. The trees rang with Bella's screams as she sunk on her knees, gazing in fascinated terror at the blank, unseeing eyes, the fallen jaw, the cheeks turning to a livid gray, the ashen lips that had uttered their last gibe; she was still kneeling there when the young men came dashing along the path and through the trees. Stephen raised her to her feet, and she clung to him a moment, sobbing.

"How did he come here? What did he come for?" demanded Jerome.

"He walked, sorr," replied John, "an' whin he got here he stritched out his arm an' flung a bit o'

brass over; an' he was dead before she had time to scream wanst."

"What was it he threw? Did he say nothing?"

"He sez, 'It's Diana's,—tell Jerome,' that's all."

The young man groaned. His head drooped on his breast and a bitter despair gathered in his face. Only a moment since the precious clew had been within reach; now it lay fathoms deep in the Niagara.

But instantly he raised his head, unconquered. "There is one chance yet," he said. "Mrs. Forrester, can you spare me that silver trident from your hair?" She handed him the pin, and he pushed it down into the gravelly earth to mark the spot where the old man had stood. "Now, Stephen, help the lady to the house. John, fetch that settee."

It was brought, and they lifted Marcy Forrester's emaciated body upon it. Stephen supported Bella's languid footsteps; Jerome and John lifted the settee with its inert burden and bore it across the lawn, their heads uncovered in reverence to the dread Power that stalked among them all.

CHAPTER XV.

"It is an everlasting duty, the duty of being brave."

THOMAS CARLYLE.

DEATH usually brings into a house a bustle and activity in strange contrast to the still Presence which is its cause; but on this occasion there was very little to be done. Jerome prepared no long

obituaries, ordered no flowers, wrote no letters of announcement. He had but to drive to the village, summon an undertaker, and leave the briefest possible notice at the newspaper office. When he returned Stephen met him as he drove up with the intelligence that the undertaker and his assistant were already in the house.

"Very well," said Jerome, alighting and taking from the phaeton a large coil of rope some three-fourths of an inch in thickness. "Brooks, old fellow, I want your assistance."

"Good heavens! surely you don't mean that you're going to descend the bank?"

"Yes, I do," replied Jerome. "If that letter-case is on the face of the earth I mean to find it."

"You'll break your back and be a cripple for life, or possibly your neck," objected Stephen.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," declared Jerome. He was excited and in high spirits; he was rejoiced to have his long dormant activities at last called into requisition. "You will help me, of course?"

"Of course," returned Stephen. "I have just enough love of adventure to relish the daring feats of others."

"Come, then," said Jerome; and dividing the somewhat heavy burden of the rope between them they walked through the grounds to the pines, pausing at the house only long enough to call John and order him to follow with some old woollen cloths. Bella's hairpin still marked the spot where Marcy Forrester had stood, and Jerome drew it unharmed from the earth and gave it to Stephen, who promised

to restore it to its owner. He felt called upon, as did John likewise, to protest against Jerome's undertaking.

"I'd not risk it for a lump o' gold, let alone a bit o' brass," was John's remonstrance.

"You might attach a stone to a cord and fling it over from here, I holding the cord," suggested Stephen. "Then you could descend the bank by the path at the Whirlpool and work your way downstream along the margin of the river till you reached this point; then when you got here the probabilities are that the letter-case would be in close proximity to the stone. If the stone had fallen into the river of course you would give up the search."

But this would not satisfy Jerome at all. "I've been such a lazy fellow all summer, I want to do something out of the common," he said. "There's no danger; there's not risk enough to deserve the name."

"I don't know," said Stephen; "a British soldier, a deserter, tried it on the Canada side, in 1842. The rope broke, with fatal results."

"This rope will not break," asserted Jerome, confidently. "Besides, if I tried to walk along the lower edge of the river from the Whirlpool path to this point, I should be in constant peril; I might slip, or a stone might roll from under my feet, to say nothing of finding many places totally impassable. I shall not even try that route coming back; I not only expect you two to let me down, but to pull me up."

"It appears to me," said Stephen, "that John and

I ought to have all the credit of the exploit; we shall perform all the exertion."

"Av the rope don't break by yer weight, it'll be sawed in two across the face o' the rock," remarked John.

"No," said Jerome; "I wouldn't trust it over flint or granite; but the first fifty feet passing over will wear a groove in this soft limestone." He took off his coat, and with Stephen's assistance passed one end of the rope around his body and firmly secured it under his arms, protecting himself from the cutting of the rope by pads of cloth. He replaced his hat by a black silk tourist's cap, from under whose edges his hair escaped, brown and curly; his eyes sparkled; an expectant pleasure thrilled keenly through his tall, athletic frame.

"I'm ready!" he announced. "Take a couple of turns of the rope around that largest tree; wrap some of these rags about your hands, if you don't want them skinned. All right now?"

"Not yet!" cried Stephen. "Won't you shake hands, Jerome? If you never come back, it would be a comfort to remember that you said good-by."

"Well, you're not very encouraging," laughed Jerome, shaking his friend's hand warmly. "I want you to lower very slowly at first; when I shout, let me down faster; when I shout the second time, lower slowly again. Don't let the rope slacken much after I'm down, for I shan't find a very satisfactory foothold. I'll jerk the rope three times when I want to come up. Ready! Good-by!"

And he disappeared from sight over the edge of

the precipice. The upper strata of rock were shelving, so that for some distance his perilous way was down a nearly perpendicular surface covered with stunted pines and willows. His idea was that the letter-case might have lodged on this part of the bank, and, steadying himself by his feet as best he might, he beat and shook every bush within his grasp. It was in vain, however; the old man's propulsive power had been less feeble than Jerome supposed, and he saw that his only hope was that the object of his search had fallen on the lower portion of the bank.

When he arrived at the lower part of the shelf, or projection, he called "Faster!" and swung off into clear space. He had for an instant a frightful, sickening sense of the nothingness under him, and he grew dizzy as he slipped with comparative rapidity past craggy protrusions, deep seams and fissures, and little rills laughing undismayed in their loneliness. But he was calm in a moment, long before he reached the slope. When he was almost down he uttered a long, loud shout, and the men at the top paid out the rope very cautiously until they knew by the slack that he was standing upright.

Then he began a most searching observation of the pebbly ground beneath his feet. He made his way slowly down the abrupt declivity, darting penetrating glances around and under every boulder, and into every narrowest crevice. He never doubted that he should find the letter-case, nor did this confidence waver when he had reached the last rod of his descent without discovering it.

Yet, after all, it was with a shock of joyful surprise that he came upon it where it had fallen a yard short of the water's edge and lay wedged between two stones. He snatched it up in a triumphant ecstasy, and his victorious shout echoed faintly up to Stephen and John. He had singularly little curiosity about the contents of the case, feeling a serene faith that what he had striven so hard to get would not disappoint him at last. He gave one look up and down the winding river, through whose fearful stress and plunge but one vessel has ever ridden in safety. Then he pulled three times at the rope, and it was immediately drawn tense.

He clambered up the slope and presently was lifted off his feet, suspended between heaven and earth as before. The ascent was much slower than the descent had been, and the light September breeze swayed his figure to and fro; the men above perceived the oscillation with horror, helpless to hinder; but the sense of exaltation and triumph yet remained with Jerome, and he felt no alarm; he drank in long breaths of the pure air, which had a fresh, free quality as it came sweeping by him in wide liberal gusts.

It seemed a long time to him, and longer still to the others, before he found himself in contact with the shelving rock at the top. As soon as he could he caught hold of the trees and bushes and so drew himself upward, and presently he stood, flushed and breathless, beside John and Stephen, who, in spite of their strenuous endeavors, were both somewhat pale.

"Thank God, you are safe, Jerome!" cried Stephen. "You've had rather a close call," he explained. "Look at the rope!"

Jerome did so, and saw that it was frayed and almost tattered. He had over-estimated the friability of the limestone, and had nearly paid with his life for the blunder.

"Of course, when you were going down, we couldn't see how the rope had stood it; and the first part we hauled in as you came up didn't seem much worn; but when you began swinging there like a pendulum, then bits of the strand began to unravel in our hands, and a cold sweat broke out on my forehead," said Stephen, disposed to make as much as possible of Jerome's jeopardy and his own sensations in regard to it. "Every instant I expected the strain to relax suddenly; I wondered if I could hear the thud of your body striking the rocks, and whether you would roll into the water, and how I should get down to you. We did not dare to pull quickly; a sudden jerk might have severed the rope like twine; all we could do was just to draw in slow and steady. And I tried to recollect some sort of a prayer," added Stephen, simply.

Jerome, too, lifted his heart in a brief, devout thanksgiving. "It's all right now, though," he said. "I can't thank either of you half enough. I shall not forget, John, how you helped me."

"Your acclamations down in the gorge intimated your success, I suppose?" asked Stephen, as John retired.

"Yes; I have the letter-case safe in my pocket.

It *was* a risk, after all, wasn't it? But I'd risk ten times as much—for Diana!"

"Oh, drop that!" said Stephen. "Let's look at the papers. I scent a romance."

"Not now," said Jerome. "They are hers,—hers and mine,—and I shall not open them until we can do so together."

"Well, Jerome Harvey!" cried Stephen, aggrieved. "You're enough to make me wish the rope *had* broken. To be in such a state of anxiety as you were this morning, and not seize the first opportunity to end it!"

"It has ended itself," responded Jerome. "Diana is not my sister. I am as sure of it as if I had read these papers. There couldn't be such a monstrous wrong on this beautiful earth!"

"I know how you feel," said Stephen, his fondness for quotation getting the better of his ill humor,—

"'Morning's at seven,
The hill-side's dew-pearled,
God's in His heaven,
All's right in the world!'"

"Yes; I feel exactly so," acquiesced Jerome. He started towards the house, and Stephen accompanied him, feeling rather small and ignoble, the penalty one pays for being a hero's friend.

The second day after Mr. Forrester's death was appointed for the funeral. Dr. Tevan furnished the names and addresses of several persons who had been old-time cronies of the deceased; but they were of a class to whom mortuary duties are pecu-

liarily distasteful, and did not honor the obsequies with their attendance. There were present only the family, Brooks, Dr. Tevan, the servants, and a few of Diana's friends from the village. A minister, also from the village, read the burial service over the remains, and then the casket-lid shut out of sight forever Marcy Forrester's yellow face, stamped with its old sardonic grin. There was no pretence of sorrow; Bella's were the only tears shed upon the occasion, and she wept less from grief than from hysteric excitement.

It was not a merry, but let us say a resigned and cheerful party that returned to Diana's house after the interment. A substantial tea awaited them, after which they gathered in the parlor about the fire which the cool September evening made acceptable. John Forrester and Stephen had fraternized when they first met, and they were accustomed to play poker with packages of ten-cent pieces which John brought from Buffalo for the purpose; but they tacitly recognized that the amusement would be indecorous this evening, and contented themselves with conversation until it was time for Jerome and Stephen to depart.

The next morning Dr. Tevan brought the will. Marcy himself had written it on a sheet of letter-paper, and had intrusted it to his physician. He had not cared to project the shadow of his eccentricities beyond his own life, and the legatees were agreeably surprised to find the will exceedingly simple and just. He bequeathed to Diana her home and its grounds; to Jerome his own residence, with a suf-

ficient sum to make up the original fortune of the elder Jerome Harvey; to Bella the marquise dress; to his nephew John the residue of his property. To Jerome was delegated the task of publishing his Memoirs.

Dr. Tevan went away, and the three young men proceeded to examine Marcy's desk. At first they felt a certain hesitancy in reading papers which their owner was powerless longer to conceal, but they soon found that he had destroyed all documents of a private and personal nature, and no traces remained of secrets which might damage his post-mortem reputation.

His accounts were kept with scrupulous neatness, and his securities were carefully enumerated. In a drawer by itself lay the manuscript of his Memoirs, that production which represented the experience of a lifetime and the patient labor of years.

Jerome took it up, while the others were going over the accounts, and read a few pages here and there. The work was not quite finished, but the writer had known that he could write no more, and had appended a wavering signature and paraph to the last page. As Jerome read, his face darkened, and presently, still reading, he walked to the fireplace and stirred the coals into a blaze.

"What are you doing, Harvey?" asked Stephen.

"I'm going to burn this—this abomination!" he replied.

"No, no!" cried Stephen, springing up and trying to wrest it from him. "You are mad; there may be a fortune in it; you're no judge of literary value."

"Let me alone, will you?" said Jerome. "I'm a judge of decency, at any rate, and I would as soon poison a well as send this out into the world."

"At least let me see it," coaxed Stephen. "You know it can't hurt me."

"No," said Jerome, still turning the pages and finding more objectionable matter on each succeeding one. "You can imagine the sort of book that man would write. 'Can you gather grapes from thorns?' But no one shall ever read it."

"It was left you in trust to publish," said Forrester.

"Yes," agreed Stephen, "and no matter though you hated the man and his opinions, yet the trust remains sacred. Dare you be recreant to the faith the dead reposed in you?"

"I dare do a small wrong instead of a great one," returned Jerome. He felt it strange that these two men, both of whom habitually walked on a lower plane than his own, should be dictating his conduct to him on high moral grounds.

"Perhaps you don't know, Harvey," suggested Forrester, "how hard he worked on it, how it was his one solace through these weary years."

"Would you have nothing printed but children's and school-girl's books?" sneered Stephen.

For answer Jerome turned, unrelenting, to the fireplace, and thrust the manuscript down among the coals. He stood by, separating the leaves with the poker, until the paper had shrivelled into black ashes, and it was as if Marcy Forrester's pen had never

"Raged like a fire among the noblest names,
Defaming and defacing, till it left
Not even Lancelot brave nor Galahad clean."

"It seems pretty rough on the old fellow," remarked Forrester. He was, however, far from blaming his cousin, whom he admired immensely. "I guess you've done about the right thing after all," he said. "Cheer up, Brooks; perhaps it was insufferably dull trash."

But Brooks would not be consoled. He had for some time had a prevision that he should edit the Memoirs, and that the book would create a great sensation; and to think of everything being ruined by Jerome's priggishness and stupidity! He sulked, and finally flung out of the room in a rage, saying he would get something to eat in the village; he couldn't stand the lofty atmosphere of the house.

The others finished their work and partook of luncheon. Then the phaeton was brought to the door, and they drove over to Diana's. Jerome alighted, and Bella took his place; she was to drive her husband to the station, and as there was plenty of time he elected to take the train at Niagara Falls rather than at Suspension Bridge, thereby enjoying a longer drive in company with his wife. He tried to persuade her to go home with him.

"I really want you, I do, indeed," he asseverated, as if it were rather surprising. "And Viviette gives a tea next week, and she says you must be there."

"It's time I was thinking about some new clothes," mused Bella.

"The fire in the furnace is going; I guess you'll think your own home's a palace after Diana's. Come now; I'll get a man to drive the horse home, and Diana can send your trunks to-morrow."

They had reached the station by this time, and he sprang out of the phaeton and stood waiting for her answer. She was silent a moment, irresolute. The idea of sudden flight was not without its charm; she felt vaguely impelled to go with him; still,—

"Oh, I must say good-by to them all!" she exclaimed. "But I'm very glad you miss me, dear," she added, softly. "I'll come home in a day or so now."

"All right!" said John, successfully hiding his disappointment, if indeed he felt any. "Come when you like; the sooner the better. Now drive straight back to Diana's, there's a good girl, for it's going to rain. Good-by!"

CHAPTER XVI.

"The tempter or the tempted,—who sins most?"

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

"How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds
Makes ill deeds done!"

KING JOHN.

JEROME and Diana, left alone, entered the parlor. The clouds were beginning to gather heavily, and the room was rather dark. Diana opened wide the

shutters and pushed the curtains aside, with a certain effect of wishing to give publicity to the interview. She wore a soft wool dress of warm crimson, that seemed to Jerome to light up the whole gray cold day; it reflected a faint, fictitious glow upon her white neck and hands. He resolved not to refer to her dress in the remotest way, and immediately observed,—

"I suppose some people might expect me to wear black for Mr. Forrester; but such conventionalities are of course only of value when they are in accord with our own wishes."

"Are you surprised to see me in a red dress?" asked Diana.

"It's lovely!" cried Jerome. "How could I say a word against it?"

"Oh, you haven't; but I couldn't wear mourning for him. I did not like him; I am not sorry he is dead. Are you?"

"No, I'm not," said Jerome, with unwilling veracity. "It's singular, the universal dislike he inspired. John and Ellen did not have for him a particle of the Irish servant's usual affection. No one could ever have loved him, unless it was his mother. And yet it was only the legitimate outcome of his life. He often quoted these lines in my hearing:

'Even now I curse the day (and yet I think
Few come within the compass of my curse)
Wherein I did not some notorious ill.'"

"The last act of his life was as notorious an ill as any," said Diana, mournfully. "I had known from

my childhood that he would never reveal my parentage to me, and I had schooled myself to remain in ignorance; but it is very hard to think that three days ago there were papers on the face of the earth which would have established my identity, and now they are utterly destroyed."

"Then Mrs. Forrester told you?"

"She said that he threw a letter-case or something of that sort over the bank, crying, 'It's Diana's!' Of course it fell into the water."

"No," said Jerome, "I have reason to know that it fell short of the water."

Diana regarded him a moment, motionless, almost breathless. "Do not torture me," she said at last, in a trembling voice. "You would not speak in that way if it were impossible to recover the papers!"

This was the hour of Jerome's glory. He took the letter-case from his pocket. "They are already recovered; they are here," he announced, quietly.

Diana gave a little cry; she was for once shaken out of her usual cold composure. "Oh! You went down for it; you risked your life to get it!" she exclaimed; she spoke no word of praise, but the admiration in her eyes was unqualified.

Jerome, who had expected merely a rebuke for his foolhardiness, prized this admiration beyond its worth. "It was nothing; there was scarcely any risk," he said, modestly.

"Have you—of course you have examined the papers?" asked Diana.

"Of course I have not!" said Jerome, with a touch of indignation. "Are they not yours? But if I

might suggest anything, I should propose that we read them together."

"Very well," assented Diana. She tried to assume her customary indifference, but it was impossible; she was more excited than she had ever been in her life. He handed her the letter-case and she raised the lid; then she paused, arrested by a consciousness that filled Jerome's mind also to the exclusion of all other thoughts. Upon the threshold of what mystery were they treading? Had not the black record better remain forever unread? Marcy had said that Diana's mother was a wretch, and Diana shuddered with a fear that after all he had spoken truth. Jerome felt the biting tooth of doubt; perhaps Diana really was his sister; he marvelled at the false security in which he had lulled himself for days.

"Take it and read it, I cannot!" said Diana at last, returning the case. Jerome, too, hesitated a moment; then,—

"This is cowardly!" he said, and drew out of the case several sheets of paper folded together. They were yellow as old ivory, and the innermost sheet was dated nearly thirty years back. The papers were written in the calligraphy which had been Marcy Forrester's before disease had made his hand infirm.

Jerome, who had waited so long, could not now wait the slow process of reading aloud; he ran his eye swiftly over the sheets, tore out a portion of their meaning, and exclaimed, "It is all right! I knew it all the time! We are not related; we are as far apart as Greece and Greenland!"

"Oh, dear! You would have been a very nice brother," sighed Diana. To herself she added, "You speak truth: if you are *not* my brother, we are indeed far apart."

The young man, having mastered the main fact, turned back to the first page and read aloud as follows:

"Why are so many temptations put in the way of an evil-doer? If a knave wished to reform, the fools would not let him. There are no corresponding incitements to good. A philanthropist never finds his work lying ready to his hand; he has to establish missions and hospitals and seek constantly for opportunities to benefit mankind. But a malefactor has only to sit quiet in his chair, and his natural prey will seek him as moths swarm around a candle, seeming to say, 'Here I am, fleece me, rob me; I am at your service!'

"These reflections passed through my brain one evening at a *café* in New York; they were induced by the appearance of a young man seated at a table near me. I never saw a person of more exaggerated and ostentatious simplicity. His clothes were of a rustic and antiquated fashion; his air was an odd mixture of timidity and self-assertion; he scanned his neighbors with a gaze he evidently intended to be sharp and penetrating, but which in reality betrayed only anxiety; more than once he furtively touched his breast-pocket to assure himself of the safety of some treasure.

"I carefully avoided appearing to notice him, and was presently rewarded for this forbearance; he approached me with an awkward bow, and placing

both his hands on my table bent over to speak to me. For a moment, as I gazed at his large red hands, in such ugly contrast to my own white and delicate ones, there seemed a certain hardness and injustice in the inevitable law that the hand which toils and sweats to wrest money from the niggard earth should never be the hand to spend and enjoy it. But I did not rebel against this decree of Fate.

"‘Sir,’ the young fellow began, ‘I am a stranger in New York.’

"I looked my surprise.

"‘Yes, I am indeed,’ he went on, ‘and I’ve missed the train I was going home on. I should take it as a favor if you direct me to some place where I can get a night’s lodging.’

"‘The hotels?’ I suggested.

"‘Well, their prices are rather steep,’ he demurred; adding hastily, ‘Not but what I can afford to go there well enough.’

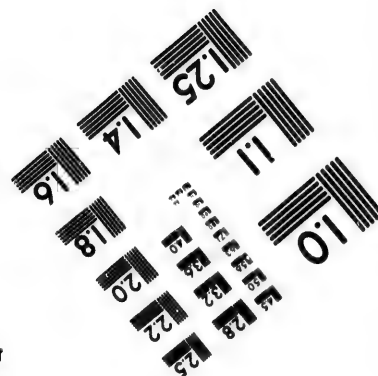
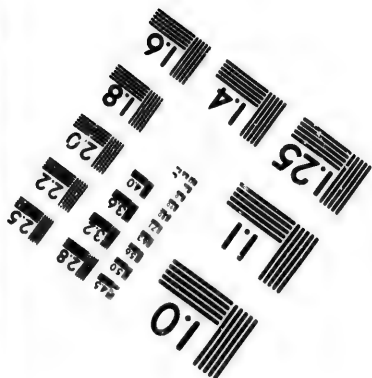
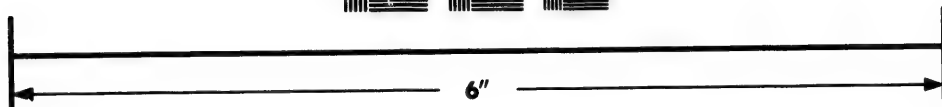
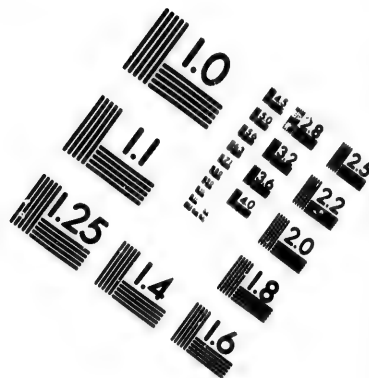
"‘No doubt,’ I said, gravely, and gave him the address of a quiet boarding-house at no great distance. Still he lingered.

"‘Will you be walking that way yourself?’ he asked. ‘If you are, I could find it easier; and I should like your company.’

"Did ever a fly so persistently force himself upon a spider? I resigned myself.

"‘I shall be happy to show you the way,’ I said, affably, ‘if you will sit down and wait till I finish my supper. But you must not be idle,’ I added, as he complied readily enough, and I ordered a little refreshment for him.





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"He tried at first to maintain a prudent reserve, but I feigned a carelessness and indifference about his affairs which soon piqued him into frankness. He wished me to feel, as he undoubtedly felt himself, that the circumstances of his visit to New York were in the highest degree remarkable, and he was soon recounting them at full. His name was Rufus Clark; he had been married three years; his wife's name was Minny; they had no children; they had each inherited a small farm from their parents, with this difference, that one farm was mortgaged and the other was not; the encumbered one was the more desirable of the two, as it was larger, cleared of timber, and their cottage was situated on it. He and Minny had almost starved themselves trying to make or to save money enough to pay off the mortgage, but they had been barely able to make their living and had saved nothing whatever, and finally they had come to the resolution to sell the unencumbered property and take up the mortgage on the portion they occupied. They had seen in a New York paper the advertisement of a man who wanted a tract of land in their vicinity, and Clark had answered it that day, bringing the necessary papers with him. He had sold the smaller farm for nine hundred dollars, which was a trifle more than sufficient to lift the mortgage; with the surplus money he purposed to buy some improved agricultural implements, for he had been struggling along with worn-out tools. He had already bought a present for Minny, which he displayed with ingenuous pride. It was an oval brooch of shell cameo, surrounded by a

twisted gold wire ; it was roughly carved in a landscape ; there was a house and a tree and a bridge, with a woman standing on the bridge. No one but a barbarian would have bought such a monstrosity.

" Well, my boyhood is not yet so far behind me that I have forgotten my experiences on father's farm near Buffalo. I talked eloquently enough of the horrors of a small farm ; but Clark said it would be mere child's play now that they had not to make up interest and dread foreclosure. I remarked that he might have transacted his business by mail with less expense, to which he replied that although he was twenty-four years old he had never before been in a city, and thought it a good opportunity to see the sights. Then I cautioned him about mentioning his money to strangers. He laughed, and assured me he could tell a rogue when he saw one, and was perfectly able to take care of his own.

" He took care of it so extremely well that at two o'clock in the morning I left him with his muddled head dropped in a stupor on a table in the boarding-house, and departed with the nine hundred dollars in my own pocket. Let no one say it was stolen,—we had merely played a few games of cards in which the chances were about as a million to one in my favor. I never saw him again.

" In a week I was sorry I had not left him his paltry hundreds, for I had lost every dollar in unlucky speculations. Fortunately, just at this juncture I met a California miner, who tided me over my difficulties.

" A trifle more than a year later I came into a

large property, and the attendant rejoicings were so vehement and prolonged that my health was somewhat impaired. The doctors ordered me to try perfect rest and quiet as a means of recuperation, and accordingly I went to a little village in Northern Pennsylvania, whose only recommendation was that mountain streams in the neighborhood afforded good fishing. After a week's sojourn there I was almost recovered.

"One evening I hired a horse and buggy, and went out for a drive,—I never had the physical courage to ride. It was a moonless night in late autumn; the air was still, and the bare trees beneath which I drove scarcely sighed in the darkness. I felt serene, contented, at peace with all men.

"I had driven through the woods a long way, when I came to a clearing. There was a house on it, small and solitary, but with several lighted windows. It looked bright and hospitable, and I got out of the buggy, went into the yard, and asked a woman lounging in the door-way for a drink of water.

"As I stood waiting for her to come back, there came a touch, light yet harsh, on the hand hanging at my side, and something seemed trying to wind itself around my arm. I looked down, and I confess to a thrill of dread when I saw through the gloom that the breeze, slight as it was, had lifted a piece of black crape against me. I shook it off, and moved a step aside.

"‘I was not aware,’ I said, as the woman returned with the water, ‘that this was a house of mourning.’

"'And it's not,' she answered. 'It's a house of death, for there's two people lyin' stark corpses in the best room; but lands! they left no kin to mourn 'em. Won't you come in, sir? *He* blew out his brains, and he made ruther of a mess of it, so we hed to shet his coffin; but *she* looks as pretty as a picter, poor thing.'

"I did not hesitate; the calm repose of death has always seemed a beautiful and fascinating sight to me. I removed my hat, and followed the woman into the 'best room.' It was poor enough, but it had the solemnity of a temple. On the closed coffin lay the pistol, old and rusty, with which its occupant had terminated his life; to the rustic mind this probably had the significance of military honors. In the other coffin lay the body of a young woman; the face had not yet fallen into the vacancy of death, and I could trace in it lines of patient endurance. Her roughened hands were crossed upon her breast, over a shroud of some plain, coarse stuff; the shroud was fastened at the throat by a cameo brooch, engraved with a house and a tree and a bridge. I had seen the brooch before.

"'Poor Minny sot a good deal o' store by that,' said the woman, seeing my eyes rest upon it. 'It stood fur a great many things in her mind, and we're goin' to lay it away with her. Would you like to hear about 'em, sir? You might feel willin' to do somethin' fur the child.'

"'Oh, there is a child, is there?' I said. 'Yes, I will listen; but let us go outside.'

"We went out and sat down on the door-step, and

she told me that the man—his name was Rufus Clark—had lost near a thousand dollars in New York City a year before, and came home with only the cameo brooch to show for it all. He never complained, only seemed to break right down, discouraged and worn out. His wife tried to cheer him up, and never once reproached him, but he only grew more and more down-hearted. After a while she would talk in a kind of hopeful way about the baby that was coming, saying it would make things lively again; but when at last the baby was born, and while Minny was sick, the mortgage on the house was foreclosed. Minny got up, but she only crept weakly about the house, and never got her strength back again. The day before my visit, Clark came in from the barn and found her lying back in her chair, some old socks of his which she had been trying to mend slipping off her lap,—she could rest at last.

“He laid her on the bed and went for the neighbors. He seemed to take it very calmly, sitting silent beside her with his head in his hands. At last he rose, saying he might as well fix up some of his old tools as do nothing, and taking some oil and sandpaper he went out to the barn. For more than an hour he sat out there, with his back to the door, scraping and polishing at something. A heavy rain was falling, and the women felt how dreary and lonely he would be; but they hoped the work would divert his mind. At last they heard a bitter laugh from him; he was standing in the barn door holding an old pistol to his head. The women rushed out

to him, crying, and begging him to put it down. Twice it snapped and missed fire.

"'Oh! can't I even kill myself?' he cried, with a kind of scream; and just then it went off, and he tumbled out head foremost into the mud, and rolled over with his poor disfigured face turned up to the sky, and the rain beating down on it as if it would wash it clean again.

"I thanked the woman for her story, and praised the dramatic instinct she had displayed in its telling. I was not sorry for this chance of repaying any injury I had done Clark, and after musing a moment I considerably astonished the woman—and myself—by offering to adopt the child, a girl. There were three other women in the house, and they all lauded my generosity to the skies. The one who had told the story—a Mrs. Pryor—offered to attend the child as nurse till I could place it in a permanent home, and without more ado she wrapped it up and we got into the buggy and drove off.

"I laughed a little at a coincidence: this was the second time within a few weeks I had driven at night in company with an infant. But I was not alone this time, and I was rather glad of it; the woods seemed less silent than they had been, and I might have fancied odd things about their strange low murmurings. It's queer how easily the good, the true, the earnest people slip out of life; a man like me outlives them all. I suppose I cannot expect to do so forever.

"I shook off these feelings and turned to Mrs. Pryor. 'This little girl was born in the very heart

of the woods,' I remarked. 'She ought to be a very goddess of the forest. What do you think of Diana for a name for her?'

"My companion replied, as she was bound to do, that nothing could be prettier, and the child was then and there named Diana. When we reached Mrs. Pryor's house, I waited in the buggy while she hurried in and got some clothing. We remained all night at the tavern, and the next day went northward. I established the little Diana in a school, overcoming the principal's scruples by a handsome consideration, legally adopted the child, paid Mrs. Pryor well and sent her home again, and felt that I had much more than done my duty.

"At present I intend to tell the girl her story when she is old enough to understand it; if I should not do so this paper will reveal it after my death. If she feels inclined to harbor the idea that I was unjust, let her reflect that if I had not taken her father's money some one else would; that I shall expend many times the amount upon her if we both live; that if she grows up to be a lady, refined and educated, it is I she must thank for it.

"MARCY FORRESTER."

At the foot of the manuscript was the name of the village near which Diana was born, and the date of her parents' marriage, of their death, and of her own birth; the latter was but a few days removed from Jerome's birthday.

The young man finished reading; he hung his head, red with shame at the blackness and vileness

of his father's character. He resolved to repudiate fiercely any palliation Diana might present.

But he was not given any occasion to do so. Diana remained silent a long time looking out at the rain, and when at last she spoke it was to express a fear that Mrs. Forrester would be wet to her skin.

CHAPTER XVII.

Ah me! what agony to own
That Sin doth speak in Love's low tone,
Looks fondly out of Love's dear eyes,
And walks in very Love's disguise.

BELLA, disregarding her husband's injunction to go directly home, drove through the village and across the bridge to Goat Island. The foliage had taken on the bright autumnal tints, but the leaves had not fallen as yet, and they overlapped each other above her head so thickly that all sense of the gray and lowering sky was shut out. To Bella's fancy there seemed something protecting in the way the branches bent down over her, something soothing in the delicate crepitations of their yellow leaves. She drove very slowly through this leafy colonnade till she came to the Biddle Stairs.

These are situated on the northwestern extremity of Goat Island, and consist of some straight, very steep steps, and below them a spiral staircase of eighty steps, which winds about an immense mast

affixed to the face of the rock by massive bolts and nuts. The staircase is enclosed in a tower lighted at short intervals by small square windows. The whole is palpably and visibly a safe structure, yet it always inspired in Bella's mind the gloomiest reflections on the insecurity of human existence, and she never descended it until some one had demonstrated its soundness at that particular epoch by going down and ascending while she waited at the top for a report.

To-day, however, when she had tied the horse to a tree, she descended the stairs without a trace of her usual misgivings. Arrived at the foot, she turned to the right, and, after walking a short distance, sat down upon a convenient stone. She was about half-way down the bank; far below she could see the little "Maid of the Mist" slowly steaming by, its passengers covered from head to foot by the black rubber suits necessary to protect them from the drenching spray, and looking sombre enough to belong in the pages of the "Inferno." Above her the rocky wall overhung threateningly, as if about to precipitate itself upon the slight creature beneath; but a stranger had once assured her of its entire "soloddity," and she had ever since been sustained in her contemplation of it by the recollection of this word. Across the river the thickly-wooded Canadian shore was one gorgeous blaze of color, brilliant even in the absence of sunshine; Bella could distinguish infinite gradations of crimson and scarlet, brown, russet, orange, olive, and gold, interspersed by cedar and hemlock darkly green as ever. In

Bella's immediate vicinity there were no trees, for no spot on the river is so destitute of vegetation as this extremity of Goat Island; there was only the narrow pathway along the ledge, the bare gray wall above, and the bare gray slope beneath. At her right hand, and within a few yards, the American Fall flung itself over the precipice in a splendid prodigality of force; it struck the rock not with one continuous unbroken roar, but with a succession of distinct explosions, as if some gigantic trip-hammer were incessantly pounding and booming. To Bella gazing upward the sheet of water seemed to drop straight out of the leaden sky, a very snow-drift for whiteness; it fell in one mighty mass, was shattered into a million fragments on the rocks, rose in a magnificent storm of spray, and finally dashed and whirled and tore away among the rocks with inconceivable fury and swiftness, surging around and over them, and returning time and again to the foot of the fall in vast maelstroms and eddies. Night and day, summer and winter, a strong cold wind sweeps and circles about the spot; indeed, a subaqueous retreat behind the cataract, through which adventurous tourists walk, clinging to each other and to the guide, is from this circumstance named "The Cave of the Winds." Bella would not have entered its dim cool depths for all the diamonds that ever shone.

She settled herself comfortably upon the stone, and bent a ruminative gaze upon the water below. She had not been seated there more than ten minutes, when, glancing up, she saw a man standing in

the lower door-way of the staircase tower. It was Stephen Brooks.

"If you are not glad to see me, shake your head, and I'll go back!" he shouted. But she only smiled, and, thus encouraged, he advanced within speaking distance. "*Are* you glad?" he asked.

"Well, at any rate, I'm glad it's not Mr. Harvey," said Bella.

"Perhaps he is coming too, for aught you know," said Stephen, making careful selection of a seat.

"Oh, no, he's not! I left him at Miss Forrester's."

"Poor fellow! She will show him her herbarium; she always does. She has shown it to me four times."

"I suppose there was something new each time."

"Yes," admitted Stephen; "there were some specimens more freshly hideous than the rest. I hate a person," he went on, reflectively, "who takes pleasure in preserving the withered skeletons and ghosts of flowers. I know a man who is making a collection of the ropes used in hanging murderers. The two pursuits are on the same principle. How did you ever make up your mind to come down those stairs alone? I thought it required the taunts, entreaties, persuasions of several people to move you."

"Oh, I can be brave enough when there's no one near to be annoyed by my cowardice. Did you know I was here?"

"Yes; I saw you driving through the village. I was lunching at a restaurant at the Falls, not the Bridge. I couldn't stand the moral atmosphere at Harvey's: it's too elevated."

"You don't find the air at all rarefied here," said Bella, demurely.

"Oh, I didn't mean that! You are a thousand times better than Jerome Harvey; you remind me of my mother," declared Stephen, with the evident intention of paying the highest compliment in his power. "Yes, I followed you, and when I saw the horse tied up there, I knew you must have descended the stairs, incredible as it seemed. Why did you perform that heroic feat?"

"I wished to be alone."

"It's my turn to be affronted; but I guess I won't."

"I had just begun to think, when you interrupted me."

"Won't you begin again, and give me the benefit?"

"Well, then, the summer is over."

"That news is a month old."

"And if I had stayed in Buffalo I should know Italian by now."

"You have studied a good many things here,—geology, literature, humanity."

Bella looked at him, her eyes gravely troubled. "It has been a very idle time," she mourned.

"Yes, it has," confessed Stephen. "We have had nothing to do but to amuse ourselves, like the people in an English country house novel. It's been a very un-American summer."

"Aren't you a little ashamed of it?"

"Not at all. I wish all the men and women who are harassed to death by business, study, society, by noisy children, meddling neighbors, worthless ser-

vants, could spend such a summer as this. It has done me good."

"Because you were harassed to death by—what?"

"By nothing," laughed Stephen. "I have always taken things very easily; I have never been through any rapids whatever."

Bella smiled an acknowledgment of the allusion. "I am going home in a day or so," she remarked.

"May I call on you this winter? I will make a pilgrimage to Buffalo for that especial purpose if you would like to see me."

"Frankly, I don't think I should," said Bella. "You belong to summer and Niagara; there would be something incongruous in meeting you under other conditions."

"If Harvey marries Miss Forrester you will naturally see a good deal of me. He could hardly exist without me."

"Not even with a bonny bride as a substitute? But Miss Forrester will not accept him."

"She might do worse."

"Yes; for instance, it will be worse not to marry any one, but simply to stay on here alone through the long, dull, frozen months."

"While you are in the giddy round of fashion and pleasure. I hear that Buffalo is quite metropolitan in its gayeties."

"You might spend years in New York," said Bella, quick to resent this tone of patronage, "without meeting as many agreeable individuals as you will in a single season in Buffalo. Our people are simply charming!"

"I can readily believe it."

"We are musical, dramatic, literary," pursued Bella. "The girls are all pretty, many of them beautiful; the matrons are gracious as queens; the men are courteous and hospitable." She paused a moment, frowning with thought. "I'm trying to recall some one of my acquaintance who is not talented, or handsome, or accomplished, but it's impossible."

"Happy city!" said Stephen. "The winter weather there is rather severe, isn't it?"

"Severe? Not in the least. There's a good deal of snow, to be sure; but that only covers up the ground and keeps it warm. You should walk down Delaware Avenue some night when the trees are all bending low with their snowy burden, and every branch and tiniest twig is sparkling with frost in the white radiance of the moon!"

"Like a Christmas card sprinkled with mica," suggested Stephen.

"Very poetically expressed,—thanks!" said Bella. "I remember one evening last winter Mrs. Bromley and I were walking on Main Street about six o'clock, when it began to snow. There was no wind, and the soft feathery flakes fell straight down, thickly and heavily. The stores were not closed, and all the lights shone out and struck through the storm in the loveliest mellow glow, till it seemed as if we were walking in a great rosy pearl!"

"That's pretty," said Stephen. "But it might happen anywhere. Buffalo has not a monopoly of the phenomena of snow and ice."

"I don't care; we have more of them than any

other city," declared Bella. "How the wind is rising! It reminds me of home."

"It is rising," agreed Stephen. "And it reminds me of home, too,—namely, that we ought to get there as soon as possible. Let us go before the rain comes."

They rose, but had scarcely gained their feet when a tremendous gust swept along the cliff and caused them to stagger under it.

"We must hurry," said Stephen. "The storm is almost upon us. Take my arm."

To his amazement Bella shook her head. "I am not going into that tower in this wind!" she announced, calmly.

"Why, what else can we do?" asked Stephen, aghast. "We shall be wet to the skin if we stay here; we might even be blown off this ledge; and if that rock above us is ever going to fall, this will be the time."

"It won't fall; I have perfect faith in its 'solidity,'" said Bella. "And I have no doubt that that tower is swinging like a cradle. You can go if you like; I shall not be one bit afraid here."

"You know you would go mad with terror," said Stephen, with anxious familiarity. "At least, let us stand in the door-way; it will partly shelter us."

"No!" said Bella, inflexibly, and the young man was obliged to yield. Another gust came whistling about them, with a blast as of a thousand trumpets; the sky turned from gray to almost inky blackness, and in another instant the rain fell.

For a few moments they were literally stunned

and breathless from the terrific violence of its descent; it seemed scarcely less dense than the great fall beside them. It beat in a torrent against the rock overhead, and dashed off again with redoubled fury. The narrow ledge became in two minutes a brawling brook, and little muddy cascades tumbled from it over the slope. The wind howled and shrieked in a sort of demoniac rage; if it lulled one single second, it was only to gather itself like a tiger and spring to its goal with fresh ferocity. The wild lightning rent the heavens into shreds; it darted at Stephen and Bella as if it would snatch the very secrets from their hearts; it ceased, and the blackness of death dropped upon the earth; it flashed forth again and shrivelled up the darkness in its angry glare. The thunder seemed rather a weight than a sound; it crashed and roared and rolled upon them as if it would crush them to the earth. Amid all these Titanic forces the great cataract beside them boomed forth its unchanging cannon-like stroke.

Stephen threw his arm about Bella; she clasped her hands on his shoulder and hid her face on them. He was conscious of but one thing,—that they were alone; in an open boat at sea they would have been less alone, less closely shut into a world of their own. Through the blinding sheet of rain they could not see the Canadian shore, the river below, the fall beside them, scarcely the ground they stood upon. They were alone; it was upon his arm she leaned, to his face she lifted her terrified eyes for reassurance.

"Bella!" he murmured, with he knew not what

of strange exultation in his voice. "Bella, darling! are you frightened?"

Low as he spoke, she heard him, and shook her head. "I must go!" she cried, and faintly strove to move away. He detained her, and indeed she could not have withstood the tempest unaided a moment. He sought for words to soothe her; they rushed to his lips, but there were none that he dared utter. A wild excitement held him thrall; the warfare of the elements, the stress and tumult of the cataract itself seemed to be raging in his soul.

Bella looked up into his white agitated face. "Oh, don't speak!" she cried, and she put her fingers against his lips. "Let me go away! No, no, I will be quiet; only don't look at me, don't speak to me!"

Stephen caught her hand in his own and kissed it again and again; but he obeyed her and did not try to speak.

The storm continued with cyclonic force; the inconstant wind at one moment pressed Bella closer to Stephen's supporting arm; at the next it seemed trying to seize her out of his grasp. It was many minutes before there was the least perceptible abatement; then, suddenly as it had come, the tempest passed away,

"Moaning, and calling out of other lands,"

and swept onward over the river, to devastate and ruin or to brighten and vivify everything in its path. Here, its work was done.

"It's over," said Bella. "I'm tired." Her head

drooped languidly, and Stephen, stooping to look into her face, saw that it was very pale. In a moment she recovered herself, and drew away, her cheeks burning; she felt that she could never meet his eyes again. Her kilted woollen skirt was so drenched and heavy that she could hardly move, and Stephen, stooping, took it in his hands and wrung it tightly.

"There! No laundress could do better!" he exclaimed, uttering any nonsense in order to dissipate the cruelly conscious silence. "Now you see, if I were really a man in an English novel I should have a flask of brandy in my pocket. They always do. It would keep you from getting chilled. We can get some at a hotel."

"Do you think," asked Bella, scornfully, "that I'm going to drive up to a hotel in this guise?" She bestowed sundry coaxing pats and twists upon her hat, but nothing could reclaim it from its soggy shapelessness. "We shall drive straight to Diana's; though I hesitate to face even Diana and Mr. Harvey looking so."

She did not really look so ill; her garments were in hopeless ruin, but her face was girlishly fresh and rosy, and no rain could subdue the curliness of her hair, which crinkled damply about her forehead. Stephen, however, ventured upon no compliments.

"Did you notice the cataract through it all?" he asked. "Everything else felt the influence of the gale in some measure; the fall alone was no more affected by it than the ocean would have been. It made me realize how eternally unchangeable it is.

But come! the water is dripping off these rocks as if it were still raining."

They made their way slowly along the slippery path and up the spiral staircase. At the top they found the horse patiently waiting, and Stephen drove him home at his rapidest gait.

"Do you suppose," he asked, dubiously, "that Miss Forrester has any first-class brandy in the house?"

"I think so," said Bella. "She keeps it in the corner cupboard in the dining-room with her black-berry wine."

"That's good!" said Stephen, relieved. "Now promise me that you will take something hot as soon as you get into the house."

"I will," said Bella. "And I want you to promise me something in turn,—promise me that you will go away at once!" She felt the humiliation of making this request, but no evasion of it was possible for her. Stephen at least did not leave her in suspense as to his answer.

"Of course I will!" he replied, instantly. "I've been idle long enough, and it's kind of you to send me to work again. I'll tell Jerome I am called back to New York, and I will make my adieux to Miss Forrester now, and go to-night."

"Very well," said Bella. She could not add another syllable; but when they had reached Diana's and were walking side by side up to the house,—

"Won't you say a word—one word—of farewell?" asked the young man, huskily.

"Good-by!" she whispered.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"This is a place of refuge and repose.

Where are the poor, the old, the weary wight,
The scorned, the humble, and the man of woes,
Who wept for morn, and sighed again for night?
Their sighs at last have ceased, and here they sleep
Beside their scorers, and forget to weep."

JOHN BETHUNE.

BELLA FORRESTER felt as if she had been walking, with song and laughter, reckless of her going, along the crater of a volcano whose existence she had not suspected. A few steps out of the beaten path had revealed to her the awful peril that menaced her, and she had drawn back, shuddering, from the abyss; but a sense of danger yet encompassed her and was thrillingly present to her.

When a woman learns that, against all the dictates of law and prudence, a man loves her, she sees in one single glance of lightning-like comprehensiveness the shame, the folly, the madness of it, and is shocked and grieved by turns; but she also discerns that he has laid at her feet the highest homage of which he is capable, and in her heart of hearts she easily condones his offence. However far she may be from admitting it in words, she is secretly flattered by the tribute to her charms, and finds it only natural that a man should succumb to them.

Bella, therefore, had not in her most indignant

moods a thought of blame for Stephen. He had had nothing to occupy his mind all summer, and it seemed to her, upon consideration, entirely fitting and to be expected that he should fall in love with some one. Of course Diana was out of the question; no man in his senses could be captivated by her; and Bella herself had been the only alternative. She thought it rather a pity that he had no principles of duty and honor which would have made it impossible to covet his neighbor's wife; but then, comparing Mr. Brooks with Mr. Harvey, who possessed such principles in a marked degree, Bella was forced to acknowledge that they added no attractiveness to their owner's personality. If Stephen was not so rigidly upright as Jerome, he was infinitely more agreeable.

For herself, she felt that no reprobation could be too severe, too bitter. It was incredible that she could have gone on so blindly unconscious of the trend of affairs. A child could not have been more ignorant; and her ignorance was wilful, culpable, for she had been warned by Viviette, by her own instinct, by looks, tones, even words of Stephen's, which she had pretended to herself were only the small change of sentiment current among all young people who are well pleased with each other. And to this complexion had things come at last!—he had kissed her hand, had called her "Darling!" and had bent upon her a gaze indescribable even to herself, fuller of tenderness, of passion, of longing, than any words could be! It had taken an emotional earthquake to rouse her from her trance; but she was

awake now, thank heaven! and she would never see him again.

It was not, however, without a chill pang of regret and disappointment that she heard of Stephen's departure the day succeeding the storm. She recognized this regret with wonder and alarm. "That I should suffer because any man on earth comes or goes, lives or dies!" she thought. Yet she persuaded herself that after all it was not strange; he had been for months her constant companion, he had surrounded her with an atmosphere of appreciation and sympathy, and it was inevitable that the withdrawal of his presence should cause a keen pain. For several days after he had gone her nerves were in a state of cruel tension; every step on the walk, every ring at the bell, she hoped was his; she felt that if he would but return for an hour of commonplace talk it would obscure the burning memory of that last interview.

But when she knew that this was not to be, she resolved to put the whole episode away and to dwell only in the future. She began her preparations to return home, and for hours prosecuted them with feverish vigor, taking a certain pride in the strength of mind which enabled her to lock the past summer as it were into a casket, and fling the key into the depths of oblivion. But her strength was purely factitious, and gave out almost before she had time to rejoice in it. The reaction took the form of a deadly apathy, so benumbing, so paralyzing, that all her energies seemed killed at a single blow. When this came upon her she made no attempt to fight

against it; she leaned her head against the trunk she was packing, and tears forced themselves through her closed eyelids.

"My dear Bella! what is the matter now?" asked Diana, in a tone of patient remonstrance.

"Oh, I don't know! I envy you, Diana; you are never moved. I've never seen you angry, tired, sad, happy. You are an epitome of all frozen and frigid things."

"I know it," said Diana, with unwonted meekness. "But I am beginning to be sorry for it, beginning to ask myself if I really like to have such a placid, unexcitable temperament."

"No! Are you truly?" cried Bella, roused to a genuine interest in this psychological phenomenon. "Of course I'm not sure, Diana, that you can change your nature at a moment's notice if you decide that you don't like it; but I believe that your feeling is the beginning of better things for you."

"Better things!" echoed Diana. "You're so inconsistent, Bella! Only a moment ago you were envying my stoicism. And indeed I prefer it myself to your chronic indulgence in tears, tempers, grief, remorse, and what not. You're too high-strung; you are always on the verge of hysterics. What, for example, has set you off crying now?"

"Oh, I don't know!" said Bella, for the second time. "Only I'm tired; I've been resting all summer, and yet I'm tired still. I meant to go home to-morrow; I ought to and I want to, for I know I shall be happier there. I'm like those invalids who are perpetually exhausting the beneficial influences

of one resort, and perpetually moving on to find another. But I can't go; I just want to lie down and cry myself to sleep."

"You are lonely,—you miss that Mr. Brooks," said Diana, with the air of imparting information. "I always thought it foolish of you to depend so much on his society, since in the nature of things the intimacy could not last. However, if you don't want to go home, there's no earthly reason why you should."

"John needs me," said Bella.

"Gracious, Bella! that's what the Scotch call 'fey,'—doing something utterly unexpected and unlike yourself. The idea of your caring whether John needs you or not! You must just stay here as long as you like. Wednesday, you know, I myself expect to start on a little journey; but if you would be afraid to stay alone in the house with Maggie, I will put it off."

"I shall not mind being alone at all," Bella declared, and it was arranged that Diana should depart Wednesday evening and return Saturday morning, and that Bella should go to Buffalo Saturday afternoon.

Accordingly, late Wednesday afternoon the two young women drove in the phaeton to the dépôt, and after seeing Diana safely upon the train Bella returned alone to the house.

Diana was going to the little Pennsylvania village in whose graveyard her father and mother were lying. It was inconveniently situated as regarded railways; she was obliged to go first to Buffalo,

travel all night, and be set down in the early dawn at a point some ten miles from her final destination. But she was an experienced traveller, and regarded the difficulties of this journey as very trifling matters. She remained with Mrs. Bromley in Buffalo Wednesday and all day Thursday, doing some shopping; Thursday night she reposed comfortably in a sleeping-car, and when on Friday morning the train stopped at the city where she was to leave it, she walked to the nearest hotel, repaired the scarcely perceptible ravages of travel upon her toilet, breakfasted, engaged a buggy and quiet horse for the day, and drove leisurely out into the country.

It was a very melancholy pilgrimage. Every trace of the two poor young people had apparently been swept off the face of the earth. They had been of no account while they lived, and they were of even less importance now that they had been thirty years dead. Mrs. Pryor was also dead, and so were the persons who had lived nearest to her parents' house. The double tragedy survived in the minds of a few, but only as a dim and shadowy tradition. The waves of the ocean of life had many times washed over the spot where those two ill-fated barks went down.

Diana felt sick at heart, but she kept bravely on at her quest all day, seeking information or relics of her family. It was all in vain: not a picture, ornament, or piece of furniture that had belonged to Rufus Clark could she discover. At four o'clock she went to the cemetery, certain that what she sought there would at any rate be found.

It was situated on a hill, and other hills rose on every side like great sea-billows, some brown with stubble, some richly veiled with brilliant autumn woods. The graveyard was small and very nearly filled; Diana thought it would be difficult to find space for another resting-place. She had to push away the long grass, "beautiful uncut hair of graves," from many an old tombstone, and scrape off the moss from more than one inscription, before she deciphered that which marked her parents' last home. It recorded simply the names and the bare facts of birth and death; but she read between the lines, and all that by-gone care and pain became real to her. She yearned to comfort those two who had so long been beyond need of comfort; it seemed to her, that had they lived, she and they might have been a great joy to each other. She would have loved them from her babyhood, and her life would not have been the selfish, barren thing it was. Tears of filial tenderness suffused her eyes; she sunk slowly to her knees upon the yellow carpet of leaves which the kindly trees had flung over the graves, as the robins did over the lost children. She drooped her head against the stone; her heart ached for the precious home love she had never known, and one great sob shook her slight frame.

She lifted her eyes at a rustling of the leaves. A man was approaching,—it was Jerome Harvey. She looked at him across the little graveyard with eyes retrospectively gentle.

"Did you think me a ghost for a moment?" he asked, when he was quite near.

"Oh, no! I was not at all startled. It seemed quite right and fitting that you should be here. It is only now that I have time to reflect that it seems surprising."

"That is a hopeful sign," said the young man, his face beaming. He extended his hand and assisted her to rise. "Your feeling augurs that you *do* care a little for me in spite of yourself; if you did not, you would have thought my coming the most singular and uncalled-for interference."

Diana sighed; her mood of tenderness had not yet dissolved. "Oh, I *don't* care for you," she said, mournfully. "I shall never care for any one. I wish I could. It isn't in me. But I think I resent your caring for me less than usual to-day. My heart is softened. You see?" She pointed down at the graves, and her eyes filled again with tears.

"Yes, I see," said Jerome, reverently. He stood a moment in silence with bent and uncovered head. "Oh, Diana!" he exclaimed, in a passion of vicarious remorse, "this spot is a shrine to you, a place for pious and holy thoughts. Think what it must be to me! But for my father's wicked treachery those two would be living still, prosperous and happy. If I spend my whole life trying to do good I cannot nullify his evil influence."

"Do not take it so to heart," said Diana. "You ought to be thankful that you did not inherit his nature. And as for them, their trouble is all over now; they have long been at peace."

"But you are not at peace; you are sad, lonely, bereaved of the affection which is your due. Dear

Diana, if you would only let me make it up to you!"

"Oh, are you going to begin at that again?" cried Diana, distressed.

"I must, Diana; I can never give it up till you say Yes or No definitely."

"Why, I've said No definitely a dozen times!"

"Well, till you say Yes, then. You don't know how I long to protect you——"

"I am not aware," said Diana, primly, "of needing any special protection."

"Did you think I would let you come all this distance quite alone? I was in the smoking-car, ready to be your guardian angel on the slightest provocation."

"I have travelled all over Europe and my own country, and do you think I am to be daunted by a few hours' ride?" inquired Diana. "May I ask how you came out from the city?"

"I rode out on a farmer's wagon."

"Yes; and how do you expect to get back?"

"Why, I thought, Diana, that you would be willing to give me a lift in your buggy if I were real good, as the children say."

"And so, perhaps, I might; but you are *not* good." She paused to fasten a bunch of gold and scarlet leaves in the breast of her dark-blue gown; then looked at him without the least suspicion of archness in her brown eyes. "You must not talk in that foolish way any more," she went on, gravely. "Do you suppose that it will be agreeable for me to drive ten miles beside a rejected suitor?"

"It is your own fault if he is not accepted," said Jerome.

"I am quite serious," said Diana. "I have told you I do not mean to marry, and I do not think it is exactly fair of you to repeat your proposal whenever you have a chance."

"All is fair in love."

"Your having a passing fancy for me——"

"It's not a fancy at all,—it is my first love, my last love."

"Does not give you the right to question my decision."

"Certainly it does," affirmed Jerome. "It is vitally necessary to my happiness that you should alter your mind, and I shall use every means in my power to persuade you to do so. You are lonely and sad, Diana. What is the use of denying it? You were weeping when I approached."

"More shame to you, then, for intruding!"

"I longed to fold you in my arms, to wipe your dear eyes, to forbid you ever to weep again."

"Can you bring back my father and mother from the dead?" asked Diana, scornfully.

"No, but I can act as their substitute; I can supply the affection they would have given you," said Jerome. "'Intruding,' you said? Did you think I was going to let you make your solitary visit to these graves, and let you kneel by them alone and feel that the only creatures who had ever loved you were now but earthy dust? It would have killed you!"

"Oh, no! I am not so sensitive as you, Mrs. For-

rester, Mr. Brooks, and the rest of the world," said Diana. "You might have trusted me to go through the ordeal with unruffled calm. All the same, your impulse was generous and thoughtful, and I thank you. And now, please say no more on the subject of me and my characteristics."

"Well," said Jerome, "for the present I suppose I must obey you. But it is with the greatest reluctance. For my part, I cannot understand why a woman should so persistently set her face against marriage."

"I presume there are a great many things you cannot understand," said Diana, serenely. "To change the subject, is it not pitiful that these poor leaves in my button-hole are the only mementos of my father and mother that I can take away with me?"

"Nothing could be prettier than they," said Jerome, noting with approval the brightness they lent to her quiet attire. "And now,—I hate to hurry you, but it is about time we were going."

"Very well," acquiesced Diana. She gazed intently on the scene around her, anxious to photograph it on her memory, then passed with the young man out of the enclosure. They entered the buggy and drove away in the direction of the town; the early dusk fell, and the hunter's moon, pale and slender, hung low in the sky before them. Reaching the city, they went to the hotel where Diana had breakfasted, and dined together at a little table glittering with silver and crystal, in a corner of the large dining-room. Diana had never found herself in

circumstances of such grave impropriety, and she regarded the situation with the severest disapproval. She felt that her reputation would be sullied beyond repair were the escapade to become known; but she could not resist the universal fascination of wrongdoing, and, while inwardly confessing herself a guilty wretch, yet continued to enjoy herself in unchaperoned freedom. They dallied luxuriously over their repast, Jerome finding his companion's silence more charming than other women's talk, and when it was at last concluded, they walked slowly to the *dépôt*. There they said good-night, Diana retiring into the sleeping-car, while Jerome preferred a tentative repose in the smoking-car.

About three o'clock in the morning a shock ran through the train, which instantly slackened speed and soon came to a stand-still. There were the usual inquiries as to the cause of the disturbance, uttered in keys varying from frantic terror to sleepy indifference. Jerome was at the door of the sleeping-car almost before the train stopped, and presently Diana came out, fully dressed, and perfectly tranquil.

"A wheel has broken, that is all," he told her. "It will only delay us an hour or so. Won't you come out for a little walk?"

She hesitated, and mentally declared several times that it was quite out of the question. This had its customary effect of quieting her scruples, and presently she allowed him to assist her in springing lightly to the ground, and they walked to and fro upon the track for an hour. No other passengers preferred the bracing frostiness of the October night

air to the warm shelter of the coaches, and they were alone. At a little distance from the locomotive they passed out of the glare of its head-light around a curve in the track, and were in a still deeper solitude, with the whispering woods on either hand and overhead the dark sky, dimly gemmed with stars. Then they returned into the stream of light, and he could see how the feathery trimming of her wrap curled close about her throat, and how her eyes sparkled beneath her hat-brim, and how delicate was the little hand resting on his arm. Then again they entered the blackness beyond the curve.

"It's like a shipwreck, isn't it?" asked Jerome.

"Very," assented Diana, abstractedly. She was thinking that when Mrs. Bromley's grand-daughters should come to visit her,—about forty years hence,—and should furtively sneer at her for being an old maid, she would tell them what a tall, handsome, manly lover she had once spurned.

CHAPTER XIX.

"But if he sinned,
The sin that practice burns into the blood,
And not the one dark hour that brings remorse,
Will brand us, after, of whose fold we be."

TENNYSON.

BELLA spent Thursday, the day succeeding Diana's departure, quite alone, and the unbroken silence of the long hours was a balm for her troubled spirit.

Her self-censure became less unsparing; the affair was all over now, and she was willing to believe that she had at first exaggerated the enormity of her errors. She gave herself up to uninterrupted reverie, recalling, as on waking one recalls a dream already half forgotten, a hundred incidents she had thought trifling at the time of their occurrence, but which now she strove to rescue from the waters of Lethe as if they had been precious treasures.

"‘I should wear a suit of taffeta, for my mind is a very opal,’" she quoted, and indeed it was but a few hours since she had been seeking to ignore the past with as much assiduity as she now endeavored to recollect it. She wanted to remember the features, the voice, the mental traits of this man who had loved her. She did not for an instant blind herself to the fact that he was rather a poor sort of hero; that his philosophy was essentially false and low; that he was equally without ideals and ambitions, and that for sterling worth of character he would ill compare with his friend Harvey or even with her disprized husband. But he loved her! that was the main fact,—that some one—any one, it mattered not who—should bestow on her the same unquestioning love and admiration Jack had felt away back in her teens! Some one found her still beautiful, still adorable! The ineffable sweetness of this thought pierced her heart with a rapture that was almost pain. She had believed the wondrous fairy-land of passion and romance forever closed to her, and lo! the barriers had somehow melted away and she caught a glimpse of the joys within, as gray tempestuous clouds roll

apart, revealing a clear space of blessed heavenly blue.

She went out in the afternoon, rambling aimlessly through the grounds of the two houses and beneath the pines that fringed the gardens. Even in this short stroll she felt a need of Stephen: he would have been able to piece out the fragment of a quotation that haunted her,—

“Wine-red woods where song no more delights,”—

and he would have classified in a moment the odd varieties of fallen leaves she gathered. She wondered if they would ever meet again, and if so, in what circumstances. She hoped they would not meet; but she meant to read every word he ever wrote, and perhaps some time she would know from some slight chance allusion that he was still thinking of her and of that long sunny summer at Niagara. She wandered about, employed in these harmless and contented meditations, till the sun had sunk into his regal couch of rose and amber and palest green, and till the shadows on the Canadian shore had deepened and gloomed from faint amethyst through royal purple to black.

Then she went in-doors and found tea awaiting her. When it was over, and her spirits were beginning to quail at the prospect of a dull evening, Maggie ushered in John, formerly Philippe. Harvey had retained him, and Ellen also, in his employ, and already they regarded him with affection and loyalty. The man had brought the large box containing

Marcy Forrester's legacy to Bella,—the Watteau costume. She led the way up-stairs, directing him to follow. He deposited the box on the floor of her chamber, and turned to go; but in Diana's sitting-room he lingered.

"This wasn't all the ould feller left yez; have yez forgot?" he asked.

"Why—yes," said Bella, musing. "I can't think of anything else."

"It's unwillin' I am to give it yez," the man went on, "bekase it's sure to bring bad luck; but yez must be yer own judge of that." He drew a tiny parcel from his pocket, unfolded two or three papers, and produced a ring. "I heard him give it yez wid almosht his last breath, an' whin we got him in the house I took it off his finger unbeknownst."

Bella took the ring and exclaimed with feminine delight over the beauty of the lambent yellow jewel and its strange barbaric setting. She hesitated the merest instant; then vanity triumphed over superstition and she slipped it on her finger.

"Do ye moind how he said it would bring stringth an' a quick death to whoever wore it?" John asked, anxiously.

"I remember," replied Bella, "but just now I am willing to risk death on the chance of being strong."

Seeing her so brave, the man laughed at his own fears. "There's wan thing more," he said. "Ellen sent ye a couple of roses from the green-house. I left thim on the hall table. I'll tell Maggie to put thim in wather, will I?"

"Yes, please, and thank Ellen for me," said Bella.

"I am very much obliged to you too, John," she added, and dismissed him with a kind good-night. Then she sat down to read, but the book had little interest for her, and when Maggie came up-stairs she was glad of a few moments' chat with her. Presently Maggie went to bed, and she was alone. It was only eight o'clock, and there were three long hours to dispose of before bedtime.

Suddenly she remembered her pretty dress, and amused herself by opening the box and once more spreading its glories out to view. She had firmly resolved never to wear it again, but she now reconsidered this determination; private theatricals were a favorite diversion in Buffalo, and Bella felt her fitness for certain *rôles* greatly enhanced by the possession of this attire. It occurred to her that putting it on would be a charming recreation for this stupid evening, and accordingly she proceeded to robe herself in the shimmering satin and creamy lace. She left her hair braided in its usual fashion and did not powder it, but with this exception the toilet was complete. When it was finished, from the dainty slippers to the ropes of pearls encircling the round white neck and arms, she regarded herself in the mirror with a fond criticism.

"I don't care!" she murmured. "He is not to blame for thinking me nice!" Then, blushing at her self-praise, she turned away and swept slowly down-stairs, looking backward at every step to observe the graceful undulations of her train.

The hall was brilliantly lighted, the parlor but dimly, except for the fire, which glowed amidst the

crimson draperies of the little room like the golden heart of a great red rose. Had the place been in total darkness Bella could have found the flowers Ellen had sent by their rich fragrance; she took the two half-blown buds from the vase, and secured them in the bosom of her corsage. This last touch of adornment added, she felt herself equipped for conquest, and smiled to recall how she had wished for some beholder of her splendor when she first wore the costume months before.

She had just assured herself that it was too late—nearly nine o'clock—to expect any visitors, when a rapid step came up the walk and the door-bell rang. Her heart gave one violent leap and then began to flutter like a prisoned bird; the color in her cheeks came and went in swift alternation. It might have been Dr. Tevan or any one of a hundred ordinary acquaintances; but intuition told her it was not.

She made a great effort to command herself, and, having regained at least outward composure, went to the door and opened it. Stephen stood on the veranda, looking, in spite of a confident smile, anxious and haggard.

To a lover each fresh sight of his mistress has the significance of a revelation. It is as if he had never before noted half her perfection. Bella had never appeared so radiantly charming in Stephen's eyes. He had planned this meeting, had thought of nothing else for days; yet now to be in her actual presence seemed so infinitely strange, so much in the nature of a miracle, that he could only stand gazing at her, overawed and silent, while his bold

smile changed to an expression of deprecating humility.

"Why, Mr. Brooks! Can it indeed be you? It really doesn't seem possible!" exclaimed Bella, quite in her usual tones.

"Yes, it's I,—'not Lancelot, nor another,'" he returned. "Aren't you going to ask me in?"

"Certainly,—come in! Never was guest more welcome; the house has the loneliness of a desert island this evening." He entered, and she closed the door. "Isn't it very cold out to-night?" she inquired, somewhat at random.

"Rather so; I walked very fast from the station, and did not mind the weather much," replied Stephen, throwing off his overcoat with the ease of one entirely at home. "But I'm quite chilled enough to appreciate this sparkling fire," he added, following Bella into the parlor. He glanced around the familiar room, devoutly thankful to find it unoccupied, and sunk into a chair with a breath of content.

"From the station?" repeated Bella, like a tardy echo. "Have you not been to your friend's house yet?"

"Not yet; I half expected to find him here. By the way, where is Miss Forrester?"

"She is gone to visit her native heath," said Bella, "and Mr. Harvey has gone after her. I dare say he will insist upon their coming home in the same train, to Diana's horror and dismay."

"I suppose so," said Stephen, indifferently, and a pause ensued.

Bella had not seated herself, and, in a nervous dread of silence, she now took the leaves she had gathered in the afternoon and gave them to him, saying,—

"I thought of you to-day; I could not tell what these leaves were, and I was sure you would know if you were here."

"Let me see," he said, looking them over absently. He returned them one by one into Bella's hand, mentioning each species as he did so. When they were all named, he burst out in half-indignant reproach, "'Thought of me to-day,' you said! Ah, Bella, Bella, is that all? Your face has floated before my eyes ever since I left you, till I thought I was going mad! I couldn't get rid of it; I tried to, but I couldn't!"

"Oh, hush! Hush, for mercy's sake!" cried Bella. She was trembling from head to foot; the leaves dropped out of her shaking fingers upon the floor.

"The little sleep I've had has been filled with dreams of you,—happy dreams of our being together; frightful dreams of your being in danger; sad dreams that almost made me weep for pity of you. 'My body was in Segovia, but my soul was in Madrid!' I couldn't stand it, Bella; I had to come back!"

"Mr. Brooks," said Bella, in a voice quivering with pain, "this is not my house, and I cannot order you to leave it; but at least I can retire from the room."

"You shall not! Oh, surely you will not?" cried Stephen. He sprang from his chair, crossed the

room to where she stood, and caught both her hands in his own, pouring forth a wild torrent of words. "I went down to New York and tried to work,—work! I think I've done my last in this world; one can't work when one's brain is just a whirling fire! I walked among the crowds of people in the streets, and they all seemed like shadows and ghosts, and I kept saying, 'There's only one real living creature on earth for me.' And at last I said, 'Shall I go to see her, or shall I die?' So I took the train, but it only seemed to crawl, even though it was flying like the wind; and yet all the time I had a fear that we were going too fast, and that there would be some accident to delay my getting here!"

Bella looked up at him, at once fascinated and terrified; she longed to get away, and the physical restraint of his clasping hands was less powerful to detain her than the unescapable entreaty of his gaze. His vehement speech had the eloquence of utter truth; he seemed to be consumed by a desire to make her realize the sincerity and earnestness of his feeling.

"And with every hour, Bella, my anxiety grew more insupportable. Even in this last mile or so I thought, as I came walking and running along, 'She has gone away; she is ill; she is dead!' And when I rang the bell I quaked lest Miss Forrester or the servant should answer it, and I should have to wait another minute before I saw you!"

Bella, unable to stem this outburst or to free her hands, drooped her head and moaned.

"And now!" cried Stephen, a sudden ring of exultation in his voice. "Now, all in a moment to

change that hideous noisy train and lonely road for this still, sweet room; to find you quite alone, and so patient with me, and wearing the dress you wore that first night! It's too much happiness; it's like entering into heaven after a wretched sinful life on earth!"

He caught her hands to his lips, pressed a single burning kiss on each, and released them.

"What a brute I am!" he exclaimed. "You are trembling; it is misery for you to listen to me. You are free, Bella; go if you like."

"Oh, I can't go!" she murmured. "I cannot if I would!" Her limbs refused to support her, and she sunk into the nearest chair, pale and agitated. Stephen hurried into the dining-room, where the silver pitcher stood in its wonted place, and brought her a glass of water. She drank a little, and in a few moments was calm again.

She wondered that anything should surprise her after the first shock of learning Stephen's love that day in the storm; but a woman comprehends just as much of a man's feeling as is expressed to her, and no more; she cannot construct in imagination the vast magnificent flower of love from a few fallen petals, nor picture the immense reserves of passion behind a quiet exterior; and it requires such an avalanche of words as Stephen's to make the cleverest of her sex understand the extent and intensity of the sentiments she has inspired. Bella regarded her lover with a soft pity as she said,—

"I didn't know you cared so much for me. I'm sorry,—oh, so sorry!"

"I'm not!" said Stephen, smiling. He took a chair at some distance from her, and delivered his remarks with a guarded gentleness, so that the manner of them was no longer alarming, whatever the matter might be. "I think I shall be sorry some time; but not yet. How can I be, when I can still look at you and speak to you? Though I should die for it, I should think this hour well worth the price! Do not be angry with me."

The course of Bella's prematrimonial attachment had run with smoothness, and John Forrester had never been impelled to declare death a trifling penalty to pay for a sight of his betrothed. Stephen's observation, therefore, had the irresistible charm of novelty.

"I am not angry," Bella returned. "Not with you, at any rate; only with myself. I am the only one to blame."

"You to blame!" said Stephen, in amaze. "Why, from first to last you have been utterly unconscious of my infatuation. You did not try to lead me on; you were only your own natural self always."

Bella shook her head. "Ignorance is wicked," she said. "There was always some bond between us,—I tried to think it was because we both liked books. That day on the Third Sister Island, when you offered me the little willow switch the second time, I ought not to have yielded to your influence and taken it. It pleased you to think you could make me obey you. That must have been the beginning."

"The beginning was long before that, and mine

was the wrong, if you choose to name it so. That first night we called at Marcy Forrester's house, the woman did not usher me into the parlor; she left me standing in the hall, and I entered the parlor of my own accord. Just as I stood on the threshold I had a strange warning,—I knew that behind that door I should find sorrow and remorse and woe unutterable. But it's worth it all,—knowing you!"

Bella listened with a curious blending of pride and shame, just as in the future she would forever lament and rejoice simultaneously over the whole episode. "I remember that first evening," she mused. "What did you mean when you said you hoped I was only a spirit? You promised to tell me some day."

Stephen hesitated, finding that primal impression almost too audacious for repetition even now. "Well!" he said, desperately, "I meant that I preferred you to be dead rather than living and not mine."

"Oh! so soon?" exclaimed Bella. "Did you really think me nice"—Stephen smiled at the circumlocution—"as soon as that?"

"I did," he answered, gravely. "Harvey wanted to go back to New York next day, but I prevented him; I wanted to see you again."

"That was not wrong; you did not know I was married then," commented Bella. "But when you did know——?"

"Why did I not flee temptation? Do you suppose I found you any the less charming because you were another man's wife? No! I knew that our acquaintance could never ripen into a happy love;

but I also knew that even your friendship would make this summer the joyfulest one I ever lived through. Oh, Bella, Bella! the cruel pain of knowing it's all over! that so long as we live, through all the dull, endless, stagnant years, this summer can never come again!" He flung his arm along the back of his chair, and half turning, buried his face upon it with a hopeless sigh.

"Stephen, Stephen! don't feel so badly!" implored Bella. She was touched by the wretchedness of his attitude, and longed to say something to comfort him; yet what words could she utter that would not be adding fuel to the flame?

"There's one thing I must know!" cried the young man, anxiously, forgetting his self-imposed calm. He took a chair close at Bella's side, speaking in uncontrollable excitement. "Oh, my darling, my dearest, tell me! Have I made *you* unhappy? Shall you always feel this love of mine as an evil memory to be shut away? Will my image come back to you by and by a thing of horror? a black blot on the stainless purity of your mind? Bella, are you sorry you have known me?"

"Oh, I must be! I was sorry to-day, I shall be so to-morrow; but to-night——" She paused, seeking for words to express that constant double sense of joy and pain. "I didn't know I should ever again be precious to any one; that any one would prize as a lover does my smile, my glance, my foolish little ways. It's like the blessedness of Indian summer, coming back for a few golden days when we had despaired of any more sunshine. Yes, I shall be

sorry to-morrow," she murmured, dreamily, letting her gravely trusting eyes rest on Stephen's, "but to-night, just for to-night, Stephen, it's very, very sweet to know that you love me!"

In another instant he had kissed her twice on the lips. She did not rebel; but she turned deathly white, and her head sunk back against his shoulder in a stricken kind of way; for a time there seemed to be a suspension of all faculties in her, and Stephen kissed her brow, cheek, chin, unrebuked. At last in one swift tumultuous rush the color came back to her face; she screened it in her hands, and then it was upon the hands and soft white arms the young man's kisses rained; he had not for one moment ceased to breathe the tenderest endearments.

"You have *kissed* me!" cried Bella, at last, in a voice of poignant anguish. "Oh, I didn't think you would ever do that! Go,—go this minute, and never let me see you again!"

"Bella, darling, hear me, listen to me!" pleaded Stephen.

"No, no, not an instant! If you will not leave me——" She rose and went across the room on her way up-stairs; but she trembled so violently that she was forced to sink into a chair by the hall door-way. "Oh, *won't* you be generous, and go away?" she implored, wildly.

Stephen flung himself on his knees beside her. "I cannot go till you forgive me. I was wrong, cruel, beside myself; but oh, forgive me!" he entreated.

"Oh, yes, I do forgive you. It's all my fault,—I

might have expected it," mourned Bella. She burst into a storm of tears, and every soothing word the young man uttered only brought on a fresh paroxysm of grief. "Are you not going? Go,—go, for Heaven's sake!" she cried.

"I may see you again to-morrow?"

"How can you ask it? No; we must never meet again after this."

"Dearest, I cannot let this moment of pain be our parting, our eternal parting. Let me see you to-morrow, if only for five minutes."

"I must not,—I will not!"

"Bella, do you wish me to think you do not forgive me? Do you wish me to carry away in a last vision of you these tears and sobs and bitter self-reproaches? Come into the garden to-morrow,—come to the little summer-house and say good-by. I will wait there for you all day."

"No, no!—I will be there at four."

"Thank you!" cried Stephen, triumphant. Still kneeling, he gently drew down one of the hands that pressed the handkerchief to her eyes, and reverently kissed it. "God bless you, my angel! Good-night!"

CHAPTER XX.

"But the first fault was a green seed of shame,
And now the flower, and deadly fruit will come
With apple-time in autumn."

SWINBURNE.

BELLA rose early, after a wretched night, and, when she had languidly dressed herself, descended to the parlor. Is there on earth a more grim experience than to go in the cold gray glare of morning into a room which the evening before was the scene of intolerable shame and disgrace? For disgrace Bella considered it; in her somewhat indeterminate code of ethics one law had always remained immutable,—namely, that the exact point in a flirtation where folly became sin was distinctly indicated by a kiss. Stephen had overstepped this boundary-line as if it did not exist; Bella, on the contrary, felt a remorse not only genuine, but utterly without alleviation. In such circumstances it always seems that it would have been so easy to avoid topics of danger, to steer clear of emotional reefs and shoals. Easy or not, Bella had not done so, and she confessed the fact with a humiliation and despondency that made her heart ache. In this room the supreme crisis of her life had just passed. There on the floor lay the dry yellow leaves they had discussed in careless tones before the face of the world changed for them; there lay the two pink rose-buds she had worn in

her bosom ; they had fallen from her dress, she remembered fancying, as though glad to escape its defiling contact ; they were sweet yet, but their frail beauty was fast withering away, as if they too were passion-scorched. There stood the easy-chair in which she had sat, her head against his shoulder, terrified yet unresisting, while he had kissed her as if he were starving, dying for the touch of her cheek ; there by the door-way he had dropped on his knees and begged her forgiveness ; there on the table lay the handkerchief that had been drenched with her scalding tears. She felt as if she could never weep again, and looked round upon these things, so innocent in themselves, so ghastly in that they had been mute witnesses of her misdeeds, with eyes heavy with the weight of unshed tears. She examined her face in the little plush-framed mirror hanging diamond-wise upon the wall, and was vexed to find its outward fairness unsullied.

"What a dull, hard, callous thing flesh is !" she cried, impatiently. "I ought to have turned black by this time !"

She gathered up the roses and the shrivelled leaves and carried them off up-stairs to the sitting-room. Then she collected the hundred trifles she had accumulated during the summer, each one the souvenir of some experience better forgotten,—the willow switch ; a photograph of the Falls, endorsed with the signatures of Jerome, Diana, Stephen, and herself ; a flower, a pebble, or a bit of moss from every spot the four had visited together ; all Stephen's verses, many of which the author had read aloud to

her as his first and most valued audience. Reading them over now, she was curiously dismayed to realize that she herself was the divinity whose favor was so ardently invoked; it was as if he had taken all mankind into his confidence in these printed things, and as if the whole world knew her for a silly, selfish, heedless woman, given over to vanity, flirtation, and caprice. Yet all these rhapsodies had a certain ring of truth and longing in them, and it was not in a sacrificial calm, but with many a pang of regret, many a stifled sob and sigh, that she took them all from her chamber into the sitting-room, where an open fire was blazing, and laid them one by one in the centre of the flames. This holocaust, external and subsidiary though it was to the real renunciation of Stephen, gave her some comfort, and she proceeded with her packing for the morrow in less absolute misery.

A drizzling rain began early in the morning, and as the day wore on it neither increased nor abated, only fell steadily down, making the gravel walks a complicated hydraulic system of tiny reservoirs and canals, and turning every drooping branch of a tree into a vertical water-course. Bella felt certain that Stephen would attempt to forestall her coming out in such weather by calling at the house; but she could not endure the thought of again receiving him in that room which the previous evening had filled with such importunate associations, and to prevent this she went out about half an hour before the time appointed for the tryst, meeting Stephen near the summer-house.

He saw at the first glance, and indeed he had never doubted, that although he had parted from her with a kiss it would be quite out of the question to greet her so effusively, and he merely said,—

"I would have forfeited this interview rather than have you exposed to this storm. You will certainly catch cold."

"No, I shall not,—naught is never in danger," returned Bella, a little bitterly.

She entered the summer-house, Stephen followed, and they sat down. He had expected to find her nervous and distressed; but she had apparently conquered all agitation, and her eyes met his without confusion.

"You were quite right,—it would have been most unwise not to have seen each other to-day," she said, quietly, and in a manner that seemed to relegate him to an immense distance. "Not for worlds would I have had you go away without hearing some things I must say."

Stephen listened with due gravity, and bent his head in acquiescence. It mattered very little to him whether she spoke or was silent, so long as she sat there looking so bright, sweet, piquant, in spite of her serious demeanor.

"First of all," she went on, "I won't have you go away thinking that I care for you. I do *not*,—not an atom!"

"Are you not deceiving yourself?" asked Stephen, the words redeemed from over-confidence by the supplicating humility of the tone. "Surely, Bella, you do care for me a little?"

"Not in the way you mean,—no, Stephen. We

have been very good friends, and I shall miss you out of my life almost as I would the sunshine; but that's all. It's a poor salvage of my dignity to cling to,—saying that I don't love you; I think it argues me a worse woman,—my letting you go on as you did last night without loving you than if I had the excuse of strong feeling. But the fact remains: I have never loved any one but Jack, and though of course that's all over now, yet the memory of it will always hold me away from any other man. You just stole a place in my unoccupied heart for a few weeks; you were never its owner."

Stephen heard these truths patiently; he had all the time had the clearest perception of them. "I knew it always," he said. "But I hoped in time——"

"Oh, certainly! Given time, any man on earth can win any woman's love," said Bella. "I am familiar with that axiom; I don't dispute it. Only time is the one thing of all others you cannot have. After to-day I shall never speak to you again!"

Stephen laughed in his sleeve at her simplicity. Did she really think he was going back to New York, and that she would have courage to return home? He expected to see her again in twenty-four hours at latest, and in a mood as different from this austere one as noon from midnight. It was this serene trust which enabled him to preserve his air of grave calm.

"There's another thing," Bella went on. "Last night you said something—I forget what—about my being free. Well, if I were free, I would not marry you,—I would rather spring off here,"—she turned,

bent over the railing, and let her gaze sink plummet-like down past trees and rocks to the gray river eddying and twisting by in slow, snake-like coils,—“into that water, and choke and strangle and drown, than be your wife!”

“That’s an unkind thing to say, Bella!” cried the young man, a dark flush on his cheek revealing that he was deeply stung. “It’s more than unkind,—it’s cruel, it’s insulting.”

“I don’t care,—it’s true!” said Bella, unflinching. “If my husband had married a girl who hated him he would have made her happy, because he is faithful, honorable, considerate. You are none of those things,—faithful least of all. Don’t you suppose I recognize in you a lover of long experience and practice? There have been a score of women before me; my image will be obliterated, and there will be a score after me.”

“I assure you, Bella, on my word as a gentleman——” began Stephen in angry protest; but she interrupted him.

“Oh, don’t talk!” she cried, impatiently. “You talked last night; it’s my turn now. Yes, I always suspected you were not good, and now I am thoroughly convinced of it.” She gazed at him a moment in speculative interest, as if he were a monster of depravity personally quite unknown to her, and then dismissed that aspect of the case with a wave of the hand. “There’s one more thing,” she resumed. “To-morrow night at home—if Jack doesn’t go to lodge—I shall tell him the whole story, every word.”

“Good heavens! he will shoot me!”

"If you do such things, you must expect to be shot."

"Oh, I don't care about that; it's you I am thinking of. There will be a scandal, and you will be the sufferer. You have done nothing, yet your husband will never forgive you."

"Yes, he will; I am sure he will; but even if he does not, and sends me out West and gets a divorce,—or however it's done,—I should prefer even that to keeping a secret with a stranger from my own husband."

After a moment's anxious thought Stephen yielded the point. He knew that before she met her husband there would be a decided reaction in her mind, and he was not afraid to depend on her ultimate discretion.

"If only things had not come to *quite* such a pass!" she mourned. "I really should not so much have minded your feeling if I had never known of it; that is, if I could think still, as I did until last evening, that it was just a hazy imagining, a foolish fancy of my own. But after that climax I cannot doubt and equivocate to myself any more; it's a sad, sad fact to be faced and lived down by both of us. And it's one of the things that won't bear discussion. Some troubles you can talk over and dissipate in doing so; but this! Every moment we spend together makes it worse. I must go."

She rose, and Stephen made little effort to detain her, relying fully upon the hope of seeing her tomorrow in a more placable spirit. The rain had at last ceased, and in the west a broad band of orange

belted the horizon. Overhead the dark-blue clouds showed no signs of breaking away, but hung low, heavy, and threatening above the earth lying forever at their mercy.

Bella went out of the summer-house, and, as Stephen followed, turned to face him.

"There's yet one thing more," she faltered, her composure for the first time giving way. Her cheeks were carmine, and she seemed to be intently studying the monogram on her silver umbrella-handle. "It's this: Jack will forgive me and forget it all; but you! Shall you think, when you never see me any more, that I was a light woman, a coquette? Shall you believe that I have ever let other men talk to me as you have done?"

She spoke in a tone of piteous entreaty, and as she finished raised her eyes, full of anguish, to Stephen's. He groaned at the impotence of language; it seemed to him that he might as well be silent, so inadequate were mere words to express what he felt. He took her disengaged hand in his and pressed his lips upon it.

"Bella, dearest, even more than I love you I admire and respect you. I can never think of you except as the sweetest woman that ever drew breath. You will be just like a white star in my memory always!"

"It would be harder than anything else to bear,—knowing that you despised me and thought lightly of me," she went on, her lips quivering like a grieving child's.

"Never, my darling, never! You have been all

innocence, all goodness to me. It has blessed me to know you; it has made me a better man. As long as I live I shall feel your uplifting influence, my love, my queen!"

"I'm so glad!" whispered Bella, well content. "And now,—good-by, Stephen!"

He kissed her hand once more and released it, and she walked away, turning once, her face rosy-white against the perennial green of the pines, to smile back a last farewell.

The young man re-entered the summer-house and sat thinking and smoking till the mist from the river below came sweeping up in vast multitudinous billows, and the brilliant belt of orange faded to pale gold, chilling slowly out of the sky. Then he went home, dined with relish, and spent a not disagreeable evening among Marcy Forrester's books. He was no longer restless and unhappy, as he had been in New York; Bella had uttered her invincible repugnance to him and to his avowals, and that was the last he should hear of it; he had let her have her innings to-day, and he felt that the morrow ought to bring some compensation to him.

He went to bed at midnight, and slept soundly for some hours, when he woke suddenly, in the gray of earliest dawn, with a horrible confused sense of trouble and distress, from out of which the dream that had aroused him gradually evolved itself into distinctness.

He had seen a vision, real and clear as the actuality had been, of Bella as he last beheld her that afternoon, standing against the sombre green, smiling,

blushing, an indescribable tenderness in her eyes. As he gazed at her a tiny crevice crept along the earth between them, widening to a fissure and then to a terrible ragged rent that thrust them in an instant far apart, and changed the tenderness of Bella's eyes to wild alarm. Slowly the earth began to recede from its foundations, trees tottered, rocks fell, and still Stephen stood helpless, despairing, faint with the misery of seeing his beloved so reft away from him. He could not save her,—no, but he could die with her! and with one mighty effort he leaped over the chasm to her side, and clasped her in his arms, and they bravely faced their awful doom together, looking not on the havoc around them, but only into each other's eyes, with a passionate rapture even chaos could not subdue. For chaos reigned once more, in the crash with which at last the whole bank caved away and came tumbling and hurtling down in utter disintegration, amid a whirlwind of dust and riven stones and crumbling earth, amid the roar of trees uprooted and sundering rocks, amid the rush of streams loosed from their dark prisons in the rocky wall. And Stephen pressed Bella's face against his breast, and bowed his head upon her hair, and closed his eyes to shut out the sight of their last worst agony. And then they sunk together, still in that close embrace, down, down through the lucent green Niagara, and all the torn dismembered earth heaped itself around and over them to be their grave, and the one greatest rock of all flung its tremendous mass upon them and closed the door of their sepulchre forever.

The horror of this dream projected itself beyond Stephen's waking, and he rose from bed trembling, with cold drops of perspiration on his brow. He dressed, descended the stairs, put on his hat and overcoat, and went out-doors, knowing instinctively that the oppression of his dream would not be dispelled until he had seen her, or had at least seen the chamber-windows within which she was peacefully sleeping. He walked briskly along the road, not caring to go by the garden path which was the scene of his vision, and he had nearly passed Diana's house before anything occurred to justify his vague terror. As he came opposite the hall-door he saw Maggie standing on the threshold, straining her eyes through the semi-obscurity to make him out. When she saw who he was she ran out to the road and clutched his arm.

"Oh, Mr. Brooks! she's sick, she's dying!" she cried.

He could not speak, not even to deny it; he had feared something like this ever since he woke.

"Mrs. Forrester, I mean," the girl went on. "She went out in that rain yesterday and came home all fagged out, with her skirts and shoulders damp; but I couldn't get her to change her clothes and drink something hot. She just sat and stared out of her bedroom window in a wretched kind of way, and when I went to bed she was sitting there still. About one o'clock I heard her moving, and went into her room. She said she was going to have pneumonia; she had had it before, and knew just what to do. She took some medicine, but it didn't

seem to help her any, and her fever got higher and higher till it was just raging. I made up a rousing fire in the sitting-room and drew a lounge close up to it, and she lay there all night. Her mind wandered a little,—she talked about being in the rapids and going over the Falls."

"Go on!" gasped Stephen.

"Well, I didn't dare leave her to go for a doctor, let alone walking all alone over that dark road in the dead of night. A little while ago the fever went away and she fell asleep, and I went around and put out the lights; I thought it would make it seem as if daylight were coming sooner. She is sleeping there still, and to look at her you'd think she might die any minute."

"It can't be so bad as that," Stephen managed to say. "I'll run back and bring Ellen over, and send John for Dr. Tevan."

"No, no!" cried Maggie, in a fresh access of terror. She had evidently been overwrought by the night of anxiety. "Don't ask me to stay alone in that dreadful house another moment. Just think! what if anything should happen"—Stephen shuddered at the paraphrase—"and me there all alone with her! I'll go for Ellen. You can listen in the hall below. She will not wake for an hour yet." And before he could stop her she was fleeing rapidly down the road.

He could have run after her and struck her for her cowardice. "My poor Bella! as if you had the pestilence!" he muttered. He knew that if she really had pneumonia and had been able to break up

the fever so soon, that she was now practically out of danger, unless a relapse or some complication should set in; but this reflection had no power to quiet his apprehensions. He entered the house and stood listening at the foot of the stairs. For many minutes the snapping of the fire was the only sound audible; the morning light grew stronger and poured in a flood of purple, crimson, and orange through the little rose-window on the landing. At last a faint call, hardly above a whisper, floated down to him.

"Maggie!"

He ran lightly up-stairs and paused in the upper hall just outside of the *portière* dividing it from the sitting-room. If he could but be of some use,—if she would only permit him to serve her, to lift her head and hold a glass of water to her lips!

"Maggie is not here; she has gone for Ellen, and will be back in a moment," he explained, gently, his heart beating to suffocation. "No one is in the house but myself,—Stephen Brooks. Can I do anything for you?"

A silence ensued, so long that he hoped she had lapsed into slumber again. But presently she whispered "Come in!" and he pushed aside the *portière* and entered.

She lay on the lounge beneath a fleecy weight of blankets; she wore a white wool dressing-gown, and her shoulders and throat were wrapped in a creamy shawl. The fire was sparkling and glowing close at hand, but all this artificial warmth could not dissipate a certain deadly chill Stephen saw in her face,

which the last twelve hours had drained of all its swift red blood. Her eyes were sunken; the couch with its white draperies had the semblance of a bier; the only spots of color about her were the golden glitter of the gem on her hand, and the ruddy reflections of the firelight on the shining waves of hair that strayed over the pillow.

"Stephen!" she murmured. "Dear Stephen, I am not going to get well."

He began some inarticulate protest, but she checked him.

"No, I am not,—I know it. It is better so. Do you know how it would have ended if I had lived? I am a poor weak thing, with a mind like shifting sand, and it would have ended in my running away with you."

"Hush! don't say such things!" implored Stephen.

"But I shall not tell Jack," she went on. "There is time for me to tell him, but not time to make him understand it and pardon me."

"He has nothing to pardon *you*!" cried Stephen.

"And now, dear, you must go!" She extended her hand, and the young man advanced and knelt at her side as at a shrine. Gently he took her hand in his own and laid his forehead on it; with her other hand Bella smoothed his hair a moment. "Thank you for thinking me nice," she said, scarcely above her breath. "Don't mourn for me too long, dear Stephen; but oh, don't quite forget me!"

"Never, never!" he cried, passionately. An irresistible conviction of her imminent danger mastered him, and, unable to utter a single word of hope or

cheer, he got himself to the door-way. On the threshold he turned; she had already closed her eyes and seemed to be again asleep, and, with a burning moisture dimming his own eyes, he went softly down-stairs.

There he waited, his whole consciousness merged into a voiceless prayer for her life, till Maggie and Ellen came. In a few minutes Dr. Tevan arrived; he reported, as Stephen had foreseen, that the prompt abatement of the fever had reduced the amount of danger to a minimum, but at the patient's request he sent Stephen to telegraph for her husband.

Forrester came on the earliest possible train, accompanied by the physician who had attended Bella from her infancy. Diana returned from her journey, and Mrs. Bromley came down in the afternoon; the whole house pulsed with anxiety. To Stephen it seemed a year since that night he had hastened from the station and had found Bella in her bewitching dress, with the pink roses on her breast shaking out their wealth of fragrance.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Now that I talk men dig my grave for me
Out in the rain, and in a little while
I shall be thrust in some sad space of earth
Out of your eyes; I am afraid to die,
For the harsh dust will lie upon my face
Too thick to see you pass."

SWINBURNE.

THREE days passed, during which Stephen Brooks underwent an amount of suffering greater than he had supposed any mortal, least of all himself, capable of enduring. To stand with fettered hands and see her drift away over that unknown sea out of his reach; to be in a hell of remorse and baffled love and pity, deluded with false hopes, racked with wild despair; to have the agony of knowing her illness to be the punishment for his own madness,—this, and a thousand times this, was his portion in those three days.

There was no outlet possible for the bitter stream of self-communing in whose waters was not one sweet drop; he could not even try to utter his unutterable pain, for he dared not hint of his feeling to any living soul; he could only call at the house several times a day and inquire for the invalid in a perfunctory manner, guarding all the time lest the quiver of an eyelash, a break in the voice should betray him. The confident expectations of her re-

covery had proved fallacious, and it was undeniable that she was very ill. He longed to question Maggie or Ellen, and learn the minute particulars no one seemed to think he would be interested in; but for Bella's own sake he refrained. He had an insane fancy that if he could be with her and hold her hands tight in his own the mere physical constraint could somehow keep her soul on earth. He made almost no attempt to sleep, but paced up and down half the night near the house, and when at last he forced himself to leave the spot, he trembled lest she should pass away during his absence; he felt that he must be as near her as he could in that last awful struggle.

He had long ceased to analyze his feelings about her, to compare her with other women "lightly won and lightly lost" before he knew her. She was just herself, and, being so, was sun and stars and earth to him. All joy, goodness, holiness, all pure and noble thoughts, all high ambitions, all dreams of usefulness, centred about her. He had not at first deemed his sentiment for her any different from many others he had known; but now he recognized that it implied truth instead of falseness, renunciation instead of self-indulgence, love instead of passion, a lifetime instead of a few fleeting weeks. A lifetime! Yes, he loved Bella Forrester with the unchanging love that "bears it out even to the edge of doom." He should always love her, he knew, even if—if— But it made him giddy to think of going on year after year with this hopeless ache in his breast, while the grass waved lightly and the senseless birds sang on and on above her grave.

It could not be! They would surely save her. She was precious to so many,—God would put forth His hand and thrust the pale Destroyer from his victim. That nature of childlike sweetness and simplicity, that generous spirit, that bright intellect, that sunny smile, those gentle wistful eyes,—must these all go the way of dusty death? No, it could not be!

And yet,—oh, to pierce the walls of her dying chamber with one word of love, of comfort, before the deep irrevocable silence should roll between them! Oh, to tell her in passionate accents that should penetrate the ear already growing dull and cold how her sainted memory would make him a better man, and more worthy to have known her! Oh, to yield every drop of blood leaping through his own veins, if so she might be saved! Oh, to fling himself on his knees beside her and receive her last fluttering breath on his lips; to uphold and strengthen and help her; to guide her shrinking feet to the very verge of the dark valley; to make the knowledge of his undying love her last consciousness on earth!

At last the silence broke and the curtain lifted a little. Diana answered his ring late in the evening of the third day, and at the first glimpse of her Stephen knew that she had improvement to report. She came out upon the veranda and closed the door behind her.

"There is hope?" he cried.

"The merest thread only, but even that is more than we have dared to say hitherto. Poor thing!

she is as variable as ever. One minute she beseeches us not to let her die, and the next time she is able to speak she says she is quite willing to go. It gave us all a great shock this afternoon when she made her will."

An electric thrill of anguish ran through Stephen, and his heart contracted in a spasm of pain. He dared not trust himself to speak, but Diana marvelled at the haggardness of his face as the light fell upon it through the stained glass of the door.

"She could not write," Diana went on, "but she managed to whisper how she wished to dispose of her jewelry and books. She remembered us all,—Mr. Harvey, the servants, every one. She wanted us to have the things, she said, even if she recovered. We thought the exertion would exhaust her, but she seemed to rally after it, and has been better ever since."

"Thank God! Thank God!"

"And this is what she sent you, Mr. Brooks," resumed Diana, giving him a little parcel. "It's a curious ring Marcy Forrester gave her. She values it highly, though she has only worn it a few days. She drew it from her finger and wrapped it in that paper, just as it is now."

"There was no message?"

"None; you know every word costs her an effort to utter. She only said 'For Mr. Brooks.'"

"Better so," thought Stephen. "Better silence than only such a message as could come through the mouth of another." Then, "You say there is hope,—you are sure of it?"

"We are sure of it, I am happy to say," was the answer; and then Stephen was left alone in the darkness. He hurried home with a bounding heart, went to his room, and examined the token she had sent him. It was sweet of her to think of him in spite of her weakness and pain; it was sweet of her to wrap the ring away from all other human touch, so that fresh from the contact of her finger it might come to circle his own. He folded the paper and put it in his pocket-book, so dear to him was the veriest trifle her hands had held, and slipped the ring on his finger. Whether Belia lived or died, he meant that ring to shine on his finger in his coffin.

But she would live! Diana had said there was hope. Blessed word! He repeated it in his heart over and over again throughout the evening, while he made an empty show of reading, or talked absently with Jerome.

When they had separated for the night the inevitable doubt and fear crept back into his mind. "The merest thread" of hope, Diana had said. Ah, if that thread should break! All that money, all that skill could do was being done; but how often the highest human aid proved futile! The teachings of his boyhood came back to him with an importunate knocking that would not be denied, and at last he bent his stubborn knees, hid his face in his hands, and breathed forth a prayer in a sobbing whisper. He knew not either then or afterwards what he said, he only knew that his heart was winnowed of all selfishness and evil, and that he was willing at last never to see her again, to go away and be forgotten of her,

if that sacrifice would keep her on the warm, sweet earth, among the flowers and birds and sunshine. Pitiful God! let him atone by all his coming life for his sins, and strike him not through that dear one! She was so young to die! Strengthen those faint and weary limbs, O Lord, and breathe back the breath of life through those pallid lips! Oh, what was he to ask this priceless boon? Nothing,—worse than nothing; but for her own sake, for Christ's sake, save her, Lord, oh, save her!

He rose, strangely comforted by the exercise of the faith forgotten since his childhood, and threw himself on his bed. He did not mean to sleep, but he was tired out by his long vigil, and lulled by an unwonted sense of hope and security, and after a few moments' dreamy meditation he closed his eyes and slept for hours.

He woke at dawn, as he had done four days before, but not with that former sense of oppression and alarm. When he had dressed and gone out into the open air he thought the weather alone sufficient to cause renewed cheer. There was neither wind nor frost, and the atmosphere had the delicious freshness of spring; the sun had not yet risen, but a golden haze in the east heralded his coming; the vast arch overhead was of summer's deep unsearchable blue. Almost all the leaves had fallen, and they lay in wet yellow heaps, forerunners of the coming snow-drifts, just where the latest breeze had blown them; they sent up, in unconquered beneficence, an odor as sweet and welcome as their shade had ever been.

It was a beautiful morning, and as Stephen walked briskly along the road it seemed to him that in the fitness of things good news must be awaiting him. It was too early yet to go to the door, and as he neared the house he paused and waited, leaning against a tree, and screened from observation by the shrubbery. The place was wrapped in tranquillity and peace, as if the angel of healing had indeed descended upon it during the night, and the young man's heart refused to frame any forebodings.

"She is much better; she is out of danger; she sleeps; and if she sleeps she shall do well," he mused.

While he stood thus gazing, serene, happy, almost elate, a man came out of the house and fastened something to the bell-handle . . . something black . . . black crape.

In her last conscious moment she had begged them not to take her home when all was over, and accordingly a grave was prepared in the plot of ground where Marcy Forrester's remains had been laid, and the simple funeral was held in Diana's house. Stephen, Jerome, and four older friends from Buffalo acted as bearers. There were masses of roses and carnations in that profusion whose cloying sweetness fills the soul with a loathing of flowers long afterwards. There was the subdued rustle of draperies, the low whispers, the half-suppressed sobs, the calm voice of the minister, the music with its vibrant thrill of pain, the final gaze down into the face so strangely white and quiet. Only one thing enabled Stephen to go

through all this without utterly breaking down, as many around him did,—the resolve to let no one guess that he had dared to adore her. Even when his hands had helped to place her in her narrow grave and the earth was falling cold and heavy upon her, he still stood with the same composure. But he could not control the currents of his blood, and his face was of a frightful dark pallor.

That evening, when those who came down from Buffalo had returned thither, John Forrester stood in the hall of Diana's house bidding Mrs. Bromley good-night. Diana had already retired, worn out and sorrowful. Viviette had promised to remain her guest for a few days, to break the first shock of loneliness. John was to spend the night at his cousin Harvey's. Just before he went he said in broken tones,—

"I feel that I didn't half appreciate her, Viviette! I could see only her faults, as I called them, though it seems now as if her little teasing ways were not so very bad. And I let her stay down here all summer, as if I didn't care to have her with me." His face worked painfully; his sudden bereavement had greatly shocked and grieved him.

"Dear John, you have nothing with which to reproach yourself," Viviette said, earnestly. "Bella never doubted your affection a moment. I scarcely ever saw her that she did not speak of your unfailing kindness and tenderness. You made her as happy as it was in her nature to be."

"Thank you for saying that," said John, gratefully. "I tried to do my duty, indeed I did, and it

makes me wretched to think she might have fancied me indifferent or neglectful. Your words give me the first glimpse of comfort I've had."

They said good-night, and Viviette went up to her room. She wept, not so much for the death of her friend as for the instability of human affections, the disloyalty, swift and certain, of the survivors to the departed. Her husband's endearments yet seemed to linger in her ear; the first rain was descending on Bella's grave, and the fair lines of her form had not yet fallen into nothingness; and already Viviette foresaw that she and John Forrester would be consoled.

No vision of consolation, no least assuagement of his pain, came to Stephen Brooks. Under the light chill rain he walked for hours that night back and forth past the cemetery; he could not bear to leave that little mound in its raw newness quite alone. At last he went home, drenched and exhausted, dropped on his bed, and fell into a heavy sleep, through which he still was haunted by a sense of irretrievable loss.

CHAPTER XXII.

"A roofless ruin lies my home,
For winds to blow and rains to pour;
One frosty night befell—and lo!
I find my summer days are o'er.
The heart bereaved, of why and how
Unknowing, knows that yet before
It had what e'en to memory now
Returns no more, no more."

ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH.

THE occurrence in quick succession of two deaths in a family gives the most indifferent survivor a shock entirely disproportioned to his affection for the deceased ones. It is a menace against fancied security, an appalling reminder of the frailty of the tenure upon which life is held. Diana had disliked Marcy and had been only mildly attached to Bella, but she was profoundly disquieted by the sudden demise of the two within a fortnight of each other. The desolation of the house had been greatly alleviated by Viviette's presence for some days, but she was soon obliged to go home, and after that occasional calls from friends in the neighborhood were all that broke the monotony of the short dull autumn days. Of these visitors, Harvey was of course the most constant,—Brooks never came at all,—and his quiet conversation, kept strictly clear of sentimental topics, was a real comfort to her.

It was not to be expected that his discourse could

forever maintain this wide and impersonal range, and one morning he casually observed that he was going away. This announcement, invariably received by young ladies in stories with a tell-tale start, produced no visible effect on Diana.

"I shall be very sorry to have you go," she said, in the unmoved way which seems to divest a regret of all meaning.

"If I thought it was a matter of real sorrow to you, I wouldn't think of going," protested Jerome, warmly.

She made no attempt to dissuade him. "Pray don't take me into consideration at all," she said. "Your time is wasted here. There is so much work to be done out in the world. I think you will be very wise to go."

"There was a time, not so very long ago," said the young man, rather sadly, "when that was my only purpose in life,—to work, to do good, to lessen a little the evil lying all around me. But that purpose has been wholly superseded by another, more selfish, more absorbing."

Diana said nothing, but she favored him with the same cold direct glance she had bent on him the very first time they met.

"You know to what I refer," he went on. "I can think of nothing but you until you have promised to marry me,—until you are actually my wife."

"Oh! do you wish to intimate that as soon as I became your wife your attentions would relax, your ardor would wane? I have no doubt of it," said Diana, calmly.

"I did not mean that at all. How can you pretend you believe that absurdity? Don't you know that I should not cease to care for you if we were married fifty years?"

Diana evaded the question. "I have always felt that you did not truly love me, and did not deserve the lover's reward," she said. "It is only because I am unattainable that I am desirable. If you offer a child one of two balloons, so exactly similar that he cannot choose between them, and one breaks the string and is lost, that is the one he will cry for and refuse to resign."

Jerome did not dispute the aptitude of this illustration. "If we were married——" he began.

"I forbid you to say *if*,—to think of it as in the remotest degree possible!" interrupted Diana, with some heat.

"We could go shoulder to shoulder through whatever happy experiences earth affords. We could travel——"

"I *have* travelled; I have seen all the places that have any interest for me."

"We could go into society——"

"Oh, I tried that, too, for years after I left school. One can get just as tired of amusements as of anything else."

"Well, you are fond of study, of science, Diana. Would you not like to go where you will meet men renowned in those fields?"

"I can go alone if I wish to."

"What books can you have access to here? what pictures, what concerts——?"

"If you found the place so insupportable," said Diana, impatiently, "why have you remained here all summer?"

"Oh, it is all very well in the summer; but in winter, with no neighbor for miles,—Stephen and I leave to-morrow morning,—with the snow above the fences! You might as well live in a primeval forest in the backwoods, or on a farm!"

Diana laughed. "I am thinking," she remarked, serenely, "of selling this property and buying a farm."

"Would you really like it? I will buy a farm. Nothing could be sweeter,—to be married and live on a farm all this winter, shut into a little world of our own, our sole duty to care for the helpless animals in our charge, the cows, the sheep——"

"'And all the little chickuns in the *gardun*!'" mocked Diana. "Maggie sings a song of which that is the pleasing refrain."

"For the twentieth time I ask you," said Jerome, in desperation,—“will you marry me?"

"For the twentieth time I reply, No! First and last, yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow, No!"

"But why not? Why not, Diana? Give me some reason. Surely you owe me that much."

"I do not acknowledge the debt. I have never sought to attract you. I told you I did not intend to marry, long before you asked me. And besides, I have no special reason."

"If a woman has no special reason, no good cause for refusing a man, it is her duty to accept him," declared Jerome.

Diana smiled derisively, and Jerome, feeling that he had gone rather beyond his depth, hastened to add,—

"I mean that a woman should be too merciful to condemn a man to loneliness without a sufficient reason. Tell me, Diana, what is the obstacle in my way? If it is anything that time, patience, earnest effort can remove, they shall not be wanting."

"There is no obstacle, except my indifference."

"But if indifference is the only feeling possible to your nature?" argued Jerome, reckless of the ominous flash in Diana's soft brown eyes. "I assure you it seems to me far from being objectionable,—I prefer a placid——"

"Oh, I don't care what you prefer!" exclaimed Diana, stormily. "It is no compliment to be called cold and stoical. I *am*,—I know I am,—but I can't help it, and I'm not proud of it!"

Harvey had never before seen her exhibit the least approach to anger, and he rejoiced in her flushing cheeks and in the nervous tattoo of her small fingers on the table. She was not such a snow woman, after all.

"Please believe that I had no intention of offending you," he said, meekly. "Forgive me! I entreat you to forgive me!"

Diana disregarded this humble appeal. "I was wrong,—there *is* another obstacle, and an insuperable one," she said. "It is pride. Do you suppose I will ever yield after my asseverations to the contrary? I should die of shame to find myself so vacillating."

"What does it matter what you have said? No one knows it but me, and I consent to overlook it."

"Do you suppose," Diana went on with increasing vehemence, "that *I* can consent to overlook your confidence, your arrogance? You have always been sure of winning me in spite of everything. I will show you that a woman can prize independence more than slavery, and—strange as it may seem to you—that the sultan may sometimes throw the handkerchief in vain!"

"I arrogant? I confident?" repeated Jerome in amaze. "My efforts to win you have been unobtrusive and deprecating to the verge of timidity."

"They have been absolute persecutions," said Diana, succinctly.

"I have never felt sure of you,—I do not at this moment."

"And indeed you need not! Why, if there were no other reason whatever, my father's daughter could never marry your father's son!"

"That is an ungenerous taunt!" said Jerome, pale with wrath.

"It is you who are ungenerous, unfair," cried Diana. "You have done everything in your power to make me dissatisfied with my chosen lot. You tried to undermine my firmest resolutions, to alter my whole course of thought and action. Well, you have signally failed, that is all. The unwelcome element you brought into my life still remains unwelcome. The whole subject of love and marriage is without interest for me; it wearies, it disgusts me. Will you never have done forcing it upon my attention?"

"I have done now!" said the young man, haughtily,

rising to go. "If I had gained your affection, that would have justified my importunity. But as you say, I have failed, and so even the trying seems impertinent." He bowed with ironical courtesy. "Accept, Miss Forrester, the assurance of my constant regard——"

"The regard is mutual," murmured Diana, not to be outdone in politeness.

"And my sincere wishes for your future happiness. Good-by!"

"Good-by," responded Diana, and he was out of the house in another instant. She went to the window and watched his tall figure striding away, unable to ignore a little twinge of conscience.

"Poor fellow! I certainly was very cutting and severe," she murmured. "And I'm sorry we had to part in anger." She considered gravely a moment, then added, "But that's better—worlds better—than not parting at all."

Harvey walked home in a sort of repressed fury, and found Stephen, in spite of the cold, pacing back and forth beneath the pines at the foot of the grounds, smoking, and now and then bending his sombre eyes down upon the river below.

"One would think you a sentinel, ordered to walk this particular beat, you stay out here so faithfully," said Jerome. "I should think you would be tired of the spot."

"I am; I'm sick to death of the whole place," replied Stephen, moodily. "I know I hadn't pluck enough to pull up stakes and leave of my own accord; but you'll own that when you set to-morrow

for our departure I promptly agreed. We've pretty well exhausted the locality."

"Yes," Jerome assented, absently. He pondered a moment. "Or, no, we haven't, either! We've never carried out our intention of rowing across just above the rapids. It would be a pity to miss that experience. Do you think there is time for it this afternoon?" He spoke eagerly, glad to discover a harmless channel for his excitement.

"Plenty of time," said Stephen, with the laconic air of a man to whom it was all one whether he went or stayed.

"Of course we must run no foolish risks."

"Then it will be no fun."

"Oh, if you're going to take that tone!" exclaimed Jerome.

"Do you suppose I set no value on my life?" cried Stephen, impatiently. "Do you think I want to be drowned, and mangled into fragments on the rocks, and tossed about like a log in the Whirlpool, any more than you do? 'Take thy beak from out my heart,'—get into the house and leave me alone!"

Jerome, thus commanded, meekly vacated his own garden, and they did not meet again until luncheon, at which repast, Stephen, if somewhat sullen and morose, was at all events not rampantly fierce.

The one thing that had been impressed upon them whenever they had mentioned their projected enterprise was that it was above all other things desirable, nay, indispensable, to start well before nightfall. Yet in spite of this repeated caution it was late in the afternoon of a day that had been gray and gloomy

even at noon when they found themselves seated in a small boat at a safe distance above the rapids on the American side. Their intention was to leave the boat in Chippewa to be rowed back next day by some one else, and then to walk down-stream, over the bridge, and so home. They were provided with an extra pair of oars, and believed, as no doubt many mistaken men had done before them, that they had guarded against every possible contingency of danger.

Stephen seated himself in the stern of the little craft, Jerome took the oars, and they started. The river at this point is nearly a mile broad, with a strong current. A slight rippling elevation in the water extends from shore to shore, and indicates with sufficient plainness a reef below which it is certain destruction to allow one's boat to drift. The wind, which had been merely a light breeze all day, freshened a little just as the young men set out, and when they reached midstream they were surprised and somewhat dismayed to find the whole expanse of water rather like a storm-beaten lake than a river, and the waves running quite alarmingly high.

"They say," observed Jerome, the words punctuated by his powerful strokes, "that waves have sometimes filled boats and capsized them along here."

"They would have to be a good deal bigger than these," declared Stephen. "Halloo! I don't know about that, after all," he added, as a heavy splash of water leaped over the gunwale.

"Shall we go back?" asked Jerome, anxiously.

Stephen looked ahead, then over his shoulder.

"No; just keep right on," he said. "We are as near one shore as the other."

"I shouldn't mind in the least if it wasn't getting so dark," said Jerome, making the boat plunge through the water like a live creature. "We could not be discerned from the shore if anything should happen, and there would be no chance of a rescue."

"Nothing will happen," averred Stephen. He stooped and began rapidly baling out the water the boat shipped every moment. His hat blew off into the waves, but he did not heed it; a certain dream that had lingered, a faint and indeterminate memory, in the chambers of his brain, resumed its first distinctness and became his whole consciousness. "Nothing will happen," he repeated, mechanically. "We have almost reached the Canada shore. We two will not be singled out of the hundreds who cross here every year for an accident——"

An angry gust of wind, a rush and dash of water, and two men were clinging to an overturned boat, with the wild waste of the Niagara surging and weltering all about them, and the dusk of night dropping like a pall, and the cataract roaring below as a famished lion roars for food.

Three hours later, Diana was musing by the fire, after the dreariest and most solitary evening she ever remembered passing, when Maggie came home from a visit to acquaintances in the village. She burst into the parlor with no pretence of ceremony.

"Oh, Miss Forrester! Only think!" she cried, her eyes big with excitement. "It's too dreadful! Mr. Brooks and Mr. Harvey tried to row over to

Chippewa, but they didn't get there, and they didn't come back, and some men say they saw a boat go over the Horseshoe Fall, upside-down, just about dark!"

Diana sat as if turned to stone. "That day on Goat Island last June," she murmured, "I remember he said, 'Let not the water-flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up,'—and, oh, Maggie, Maggie! to think God did not answer his prayer!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I flee too fast for hope or fond regret;
A shining star is on my forehead set
Of lonely virginhood; and yet—and yet——"

A NYMPH OF DIAN,—KATHARINE PYLE.

DIANA hoped against hope for many dreary days. She forced herself to say that the men who took the boat were perhaps not Brooks and Harvey at all; or, granting that much, it was highly probable that they had rowed safely across and had cast the boat adrift after reaching the shore, either by mischance or by design,—it was like that Mr. Brooks to wish to mystify people,—and had then taken the train for New York. She found no theory absurd or untenable which admitted the possibility of their being yet alive.

John Forrester, with his customary promptitude,

telegraphed his horror at the twofold tragedy, and in the same message inquired whether his cousin had left a will. Diana curtly replied by mail that it was premature to talk of a will before the fact of Mr. Harvey's death was established. At times the sight, the very thought, of the river made her tremble and turn cold; at others she listened with avidity to all the suggestions about rocks and eddies and subterranean streams, all the reminiscent anecdotes of accident and suicide and thrilling escape, which are the inevitable concomitants of each fresh disaster at Niagara. She heard a score of tales that proved how youth, strength, bravery, had been of no avail, of no more potency than the bubbles in the foam. She could not refuse them credence; yet it seemed to her, as it always does when a precious life is at stake, that all laws must in this one case be suspended and the age of miracles return.

She kept this faith unwavering for just a week. On the eighth morning Dr. Tevan drove up, and before he could leave his buggy she had run down the walk to the road, bareheaded, breathless, and altogether unlike herself.

"Good-morning, Miss Diana! I came to tell you that they have found——"

"Which?" she gasped.

"Well, if it is either, it's the shorter of the two,—Brooks. You have lived near the river long enough to know that when a body has gone over the Horse-shoe Fall, and has been ground and crushed by thousands of tons of water, it is not very easily identified. There is not a rag of clothing left on

this one, not even the shoes, and the features are pretty much obliterated."

"Then you are not sure it is he?" asked Diana, white to the lips.

"No, and part of my errand this morning is to request you to help us make sure. It's a good deal to ask; but you have such firmness, such self-control——"

"It has been terribly shaken of late."

"That you can be depended upon. Well, there's a ring on the little finger of the left hand. I never saw it before, but if it really belonged to Mr. Brooks you must have seen it many a time."

"Yes, I think I have seen it," said Diana.

"Well, then, will you go with me to look at it? The remains are lying in a boat-house at Lewiston. We might have taken the ring off, and I could have brought it up here to show you, but the hand is tightly clinched over it, and it did seem as if the only thing which the water spared to him should not be removed by human interference."

"That was rightly felt," murmured Diana.

"I suppose we can safely call the body Mr. Brooks's, but still one likes to be positive. It's asking too much of you——"

"By no means! I will go; I really would rather go than not," said Diana, to the physician's astonishment. He could not divine her actuating impulse: it was simply that she was eager to do what would have been Harvey's duty had he survived his friend.

She went into the house and dressed warmly, for, though the sun shone, the morning air was rather

cold, and then the two drove rapidly down to Lewiston. Arrived there, and having reached the boat-house, Diana was constrained to pause, shivering with dread of what she had to see. Even the river, smiling, sparkling, dimpling, blue under the sunny blue sky, was a fearful sight to her now,—how much more so its lifeless victim! She covered her face with her hands; Dr. Tevan supported her and gently led her into the boat-house, and presently, hearing no sound but the peaceful lapping of the waves outside, she ventured to unclothe her eyes.

The body lay on a rude bier, covered by a heavy canvas, beneath whose rigid folds the imagination pictured the mere wreck and mockery of a man, with broken limbs, stilled breath, and pulseless heart, a creature "Lost to life and use and name and fame," less now in the scheme of creation than the veriest insect. The canvas was so arranged as to expose one hand, swollen and discolored, upon which gleamed the golden fire of the topaz ring. One-half its fabled mission had again been accomplished,—it had brought its wearer speedy death.

"It is Mr. Brooks,—there cannot be a doubt of it," said Diana. She controlled her agitation long enough to give directions for the funeral to the men in charge of the body, and then, in an outburst of tears and sobs, she fled from the place. On the way home they met the hearse which the coroner had summoned, and the same afternoon the burial took place. There was only a simple service at the grave, attended by Diana, Dr. Tevan, and a few acquaintances from the village who had heartily liked the

dead man for his cordial ways. Diana had taken upon herself the responsibility of saying that Mr. Harvey would doubtless have wished his friend's body to be interred in the cemetery lot which was part of his property, and so it came to pass that the graves of Stephen Brooks and Bella Forrester were almost side by side.

Diana returned from the funeral wholly forsaken of her courage. She now believed, as firmly as she had tried to believe the contrary, that Jerome was drowned; that his body, even such a stark and hideous thing as Stephen's, was circling about the Whirlpool, never to emerge, or had been drawn away in some underground current, far beyond the ken of man. She had not loved him,—she did not love him yet,—but the world seemed unutterably poor and narrow without him. Would it have been so if he had lived and merely gone away? she wondered. Ah, no! she would never have dared to let his image fill her mind so completely, only that she knew he could never again return in the flesh.

For several days she wandered about the desolate house in a confused misery that she would not confess to be grief, unable to read, to sew, to make plans for the winter's study or visiting. She had a formless purpose of going away somewhere when Jerome's remains had been found and she had seen the last tributes of respect paid to them; but until then she could not leave the spot.

She sat one evening in her parlor, thinking sadly how ill she had treated the only person on earth who had ever loved her, and yet feeling certain that she

could never have done otherwise, when the bell rang and in a moment Maggie appeared in the door-way, flushed and startled.

"Oh, Miss Forrester!"

"My God! they have found his body!" cried Diana, springing to her feet.

"No, no, it's not that!" the girl replied, with an hysterical laugh. She vanished, and in a moment Jerome Harvey, white as a wraith and with one arm in a sling, stood on the threshold. Diana, wan, forlorn, dressed in deepest mourning, stood motionless at first, her hand pressed on her heart; then she shrunk slowly backward, with dilating eyes.

"Diana, dearest! Do not be afraid,—I am not a spectre," he said, with a reassuring smile. "I suppose you think I look like one."

But Diana was already across the room, clutching his uninjured arm, uttering the happiest little half-breaths and sobs and laughs, reddening and paling in the same instant, and conducting herself quite like a wild creature.

"Oh, Jerome! my friend, my brother! Is it really you? Are you sure?" she cried, weeping for joy. "It's too good to be true! I had given up all hope,—I thought you gone,—gone forever!"

"And you were sorry?" asked the young man, delighted.

"Sorry? What a word! It's no word at all!" She clung to his sound arm as if she feared to lose him again, and as the other hung helpless he could only stoop and press his lips on her soft hair.

"Your poor arm,—is it broken? Yes? Ah, how

cruel! Your strong arm, that helped you climb down that precipice to get the letter-case!" Miss Forrester's saying "climb down" was in itself an evidence of extreme perturbation.

"I never thought to be so happy!" said Jerome, in a rapture.

"Poor, poor arm!" whispered Diana. She longed to caress the injured member, but feared the least touch might be a hurt; she failed not, however, to indemnify herself for this forbearance by patting the other sleeve with renewed tenderness. "Poor broken arm! Will it never be any good again?"

"Oh, yes; I am young enough to outgrow the injury. It will be as well as ever in a few weeks," said Jerome, finding this solicitude delightful.

"And see my gown!—black—for you! Bella forbid me to wear it for her. I longed to do something for you; but there was so little to be done. I paid the man for his boat, and I offered a reward for—for—you know what; and then I could do nothing else except to dress in mourning. Thank Heaven, it is not needed!"

Jerome, compelled to remain otherwise inoperative, kissed her hair again. "Don't you wonder how I escaped?" he asked. "Don't you care to know how it came about?"

"I don't care for anything," said Diana, with a long, happy sigh, "except that you are here, alive and well. Oh, you don't know how lonely I have been! It has been as if all the world had gone away and left me!—Yes, tell me all. I long to hear it. But you are ill and weak; you must sit down."

She released his arm and went to push an arm-chair to the fire; the change of position broke the spell his unexpected presence had wrought, and recalled her to herself. "I shall be much interested in the particulars of your escape," she said, with exaggerated primness, taking a seat at some distance from Jerome's.

He laughed at the sudden frost in her tone; it had thawed once, and would do so again. "The boat filled and upset, and there we were in the water," he began, not gilding the bald facts, as Stephen would have done. "We clung to the boat a moment, only long enough to kick off our shoes, while we drifted down-stream like the wind. Then we struck out for the shore; it was but a short distance off, a mere nothing in any other place, and even there it seemed only an adventure at first. But after a few minutes I missed Stephen. I shall never know now whether he was taken ill, or struck a rock, or was simply tired of life and ready to drop out of it. I can't help thinking the last was the case, poor fellow! I strained my eyes through the gathering dusk, I shouted, I vowed in my heart I would never land without him. You see I had promised his mother to take care of him, and though he was a year the elder he always seemed like a younger brother to me. Well, I swam back and forth over the spot, all the time drifting downward, till it was sheer madness to linger any longer. Then I struck out for the shore again with all my might; but I had delayed almost too long for my own safety. I dared not waste my strength in swimming straight across the current; I was forced

to go with and diagonally across it. I fancied the cataract but a few rods below me, and more than once I thought, 'It is hopeless! I am lost!' But then I would gather fresh courage and struggle madly on, and at last I won,—my outstretched hands touched the earth. It crumbled horribly as I clutched it, and I was all but whirled away again, for I was clean exhausted; but I dug my fingers into it and catching hold of the grass managed to clamber up. I had almost gained my feet when I slipped and fell on my side, my feet in the water again, my arm twisted under me. There was a sharp pain in it, and it was harder than ever to get upon my feet; but at last I did so, and did not feel safe until I had put several yards between me and the river. Then I dropped senseless on the grass.

"When I became conscious again I perceived at once that my arm was broken and that inflammation had already set in. I got up, and set out to find the road. Every fresh stumble in the dark caused me excruciating pain, and when I reached the road I was quite faint, and glad enough to sit down on a boulder. A vehicle soon approached, and I called to its occupant to stop. He took me in, and by the greatest good fortune he proved to be a doctor. When I had told him my circumstances he asked where he should drive me, saying that if my folks had heard of the accident they would regard me as one raised from the dead. His words gave me an idea. I told him I had no folks; the one friend to whom I should have felt bound to communicate my escape had perished, and that I intended to remain

dead for a time. He granted my perfect right to do so, took me to his own house, enjoined strict secrecy on his mother and his servant, and has cared for me ever since. Lying on the grass in my wet clothes aggravated the trouble with my arm, and I was pretty sick, they would not tell me when poor Stephen's body was found, for fear I should insist upon getting out of bed and coming over."

"Oh, did I do as you would have wished in that matter?" inquired Diana, anxiously.

"Exactly. Poor Stephen! Diana, life seems to me like a great procession; every now and then some one drops out of the ranks and there is a dreadful gap; but the survivors draw nearer together and close it up, and comfort each other's bleeding hearts!"

Diana, making a personal application of these words, blushed.

"Do you know what sustained me during those despairing moments in the water?" the young man went on. "It was the thought that you would grieve if I died. And yet afterwards, when I was safe, I wanted you to grieve, to feel the need of me. That's why I stayed away. And you did miss me, dearest,—you cannot deny it. Your manner is cold enough now, I know, but only a few minutes ago your eyes were shining with delight,—with delight and love and welcome."

"Are you going to make me angry in this hour of reunion?" asked Diana, reproachfully.

"Do you want to drive me away in this hour of reunion?" Jerome retorted. "There's only one re-

lation possible between us, Diana. I cannot and I will not be your friend, or anything but your husband."

"And I cannot and I will not be your wife nor any man's wife!" cried Diana. "What! retract all I have said? Never! You would think me silly, shallow, illogical, and sneer at me for it as long as we lived."

"I never sneer at anything, and you know it, Diana," said Jerome, patiently. "And I don't think you silly or shallow, but I do think it is wrong of you to set your face like a flint against an institution which all mankind esteems admirable, honorable."

"It's not a question of all mankind, but of myself."

"During all these months that I have known you no one has kissed you, petted you, made you little gifts, watched over your health, or cared an atom about you in any way——"

"You state those mortifying facts with remorseless enjoyment!"

"Except myself. What holds you to this place, with its ceaseless suggestions of suffering and death? Marry me, Diana. Let me take you away from here and make a new home for you, a home whose very atmosphere breathes love and tenderness and peace. You have never been truly happy, dearest; let me try to make you so!"

"Oh, forgive me!" pleaded Diana. "I must refuse you, now and always!"

"Not always," said the young man, gently.

"Yes, always; just as often as you ask me. But

oh, don't ask me any more! It pains you to be refused."

"God knows it does!"

"And it seems to tear my own heart asunder," sighed Diana. "Do you know," she went on, letting her brown eyes, soft and humid, rest upon his, "it's the very strangest thing: when you speak to me a little voice in some mysterious fibre of my soul whispers 'Yes, yes, yes!' And all the while I know, as well as I know that I am living, that it will always be No! This contest troubles me; it tires me; and so,—oh, please promise never to ask me again!"

THE END.

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